

A CALLING TO SERVE
A MANUAL TO EQUIP LAY LEADERS FOR MINISTRY AND PASTORAL CARE

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This thesis project and manual is dedicated, in loving memory,

to Julie Ann Pawlicki,

my sister, my supporter, my inspiration and my friend.

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ABSTRACT

This thesis-project is the creation of a manual for elders, deacons and all lay ministers involved in ministry and pastoral care. The purpose of the manual is to fill an existing gap in the available resources for lay ministers in many mainline Protestant denominations, including the United Church of Christ. The manual begins with an exploration of the biblical background of elders and deacons, a discussion of the call of all Christians to ministry and a look at the various forms of ministry service. It also offers some insight into some of the specifics for elders and deacons, as well as a guide to ministering to others that contains information on many of the skills and issues that lay ministers can be called upon to address. The manual concludes with additional resources for further study and growth, including a spiritual gifts inventory, recommendations for using the manual for training purposes and a suggested reading and resource list. Also, in an effort to make the information in this manual as widely accessible as possible for churches, clergy and lay members, a website has been created as part of this thesis-project (www.acallingtoserve.com).

INTRODUCTION

From the earliest of days, God has called people to minister to one another. Over time, titles have been given to some of these individuals. Some have answered full-time calls to ministry and been ordained as professional clergy. Others have been called to serve in the midst of everyday life on a part-time and often volunteer basis. Some of these lay ministers, as they are generally referred to, have been given the title “deacon” or “elder,” while others are part of a Stephen’s Ministry, or other such group within the church. Regardless of their title, these lay members are called by God to serve, and they play a vital role in the life of the church. It is important, then, that those who serve in this capacity be well-informed and well-equipped for the ministry that God has called them to.

The first critical step for lay ministers is that they, and the churches they serve, be well-informed, and the first bit of information that is crucial is the importance of lay ministry. In too many churches today, all of the duties of ministry fall to the ordained clergy. Certainly, these individuals have a call to ministry and have, hopefully, also been educated and trained to effectively answer that call. The truth remains, however, that there are many people, each with their own challenges and needs and only one, or possibly two pastors in most churches to minister to those needs and challenges. In addition, these ordained pastors frequently have an already heavy work load with the various programs, worship services and counseling requirements within the church. All of these demands leave insufficient time for these ministers to engage in prayer, self-care and personal life, including family. It is little wonder, then, that clergy burn-out is

alarmingly high, and that many ordained clergy are opting for roles outside of the parish setting. Unless something is done to assist these faithful, but tired spiritual servants, there will be an even greater challenge facing the Christian church, that of inadequate pastors.

There is a remedy for this desperate situation, however, and it is one that has both a foundation and a structure that are not only already established, but also tested and proved as well. This remedy is the use of laity in ministry roles, roles that may be given the titles “elders,” or “deacons.” Many churches have these positions already, but far too few utilize these positions to their full or even biblical potential. All too often, these leadership stations in the church have become limited at best and all but ceremonial in some. In certain situations, elders and deacons have become mere administrators, and in others they do what they are asked, but have no real idea what their responsibilities entail. This should not be the case. It is time for churches to reacquaint themselves with the biblical precedent for both of these roles, and then to renew their understanding of the importance that both of these positions have in the church.

The positions of both deacons and elders have a biblical basis. The first use of elders occurs in the Bible when Moses, on his father-in-law’s advice, chose several men to assist him in the wilderness (Exod 18:13-27), and it is well known that the elder members of tribes and communities played pivotal leadership roles in many ancient societies. The role of deacon dates back to the early days of the Christian Church, and references to deacons can be found in Paul’s New Testament epistles, as well as early church writings and documents. Despite this impressive heritage, however, many mainline Protestant churches seem to have missed these scriptural guideposts, and, in

general, the responsibilities of elders and deacons have become so narrowly defined as to limit their contribution within the church.

Asking the question, “What does a deacon do?” or “What are the responsibilities of an elder?” in many churches will frequently produce a multitude of results. There are many ideas and opinions about what elders and deacons do, and churches have frequently adopted these ideas and opinions into their own standard practices and responsibilities. These practices and responsibilities are diverse, however, and tend to reflect the history and traditions of the individual church or denomination, rather than a universal or even biblical standard.

A contributing factor to this lack of definitive understanding is that there is currently a shortage of extra-biblical resources available for churches, as well as their elders and deacons to familiarize themselves with the roles and responsibilities of these positions. Very few books have been published that offer background information and training for deacons, and those that do exist are derived from a select minority of denominations and, quite often, reflect the doctrine and theology of those denominations, leaving many mainline Protestant churches without representative materials. A similar situation exists for the published works on the role of the elder, although there is a broader variety available here. A search for online information yields only slightly better results, but on the whole, today’s deacons and elders are left with few resources to acquaint and prepare themselves for the role that God has called them to.

In addition, while the Bible does describe the origin and qualifications of both elders and deacons, there is very little information about their specific responsibilities. In the absence of biblical definition, religious leaders throughout the years have interpreted

the scriptures on their own, and have developed duties for those called and appointed to be elders and deacons based on their individual interpretations. It is also likely that some duties have been developed based on the needs of the church or denomination in a particular time or circumstance. Regardless of the specific reason, whether it has to do with a lack of published resources, or the deficiency of biblical definition, the unfortunate reality remains that many churches have an unclear or incomplete understanding of the roles and responsibilities of deacons and elders. The truth is, when it comes to the question, “What does a deacon, or elder do?” there is no one answer among many Protestant denominations that can function as a guide for churches to follow.

The reason for this lack of understanding about deacons and elders may be explicable, but it is not helpful, because without a clear understanding of what a deacon or elder does, it becomes difficult to provide training and resources that will equip them for their task in ministry, and, without properly equipped deacons and elders, members of the ordained clergy will continue to shoulder a disproportionate load and risk burn-out. What’s more, without well-trained elders and deacons, the church will not be as strong or as effective as it potentially can be in achieving its mission, which, as United Church of Christ theologian Roger Shinn explains “is the mission of Christ...the church exists to celebrate and carry on the activity of Christ.”¹ Writer, Joseph Girzone expands this concept with his assertion that “the Church is the living extension of Jesus’ presence throughout history, so people should have the same experience when they approach us as

¹ Roger Shinn, *Confessing Our Faith, An Interpretation of the Statement of Faith of the United Church of Christ* (Cleveland, OH: United Church Press, 1990), 85.

they would in approaching Jesus. Jesus was always the Good Shepherd, warmly welcoming all who came to Him. The Church should be no different.”²

The twenty-first century world has no shortage of hardships, poverty, wars, famine, injustice, greed and prejudice, and it is certainly in need of Jesus’ love and presence, possibly now more than ever. If, however, only some of those who are called to serve in the church are actually entrusted with responsibilities in ministry, or if lay ministers have an incomplete understanding of and preparation for their responsibilities, the church will not be fully functioning, will not be able to continue in Jesus’ mission, and will not be capable of being the living extension of Jesus, reaching out to a lost and hurting world.

It is this concern and these deficiencies that this manual seeks to address. Our world is in need of well-equipped deacons and elders who can stand in ministry in partnership with ordained pastors. It is necessary that they, too, reach out, as Jesus did, and become instruments of God’s healing love, grace and peace. In an effort to meet this need and necessity, this manual will offer deacons and elders some of the guidance and resources they are currently lacking. To begin with, in seeking to answer the question, “What does a deacon or elder do?” this manual will turn away from human interpretations and back to the Divine guidance that is available in God’s Word. The Bible contains both the origins and qualifications for elders and deacons, and, while there are few specific responsibilities discussed, there are many foundational principles that can provide solid ground upon which to build the ministries of these positions. From the biblical perspective, drawing upon a discussion of the qualifications of each, it will become clear that the roles of deacon and elder involve ministry within the church, and

² Joseph Girzone, *A Portrait of Jesus* (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1998), 118.

that the men and women who fill these roles have been called by God and the church to serve in these ministries.

It is true that these roles will always have specific tasks, as defined by their individual churches, and that the churches will determine those tasks according to their needs. The goal of this manual, then, will be to focus on what the Bible identifies as a universal responsibility of lay ministry, regardless of the title assigned, which is the calling to serve in the name of Christ. This calling involves service to God, the church, other people and one's self, and all of these aspects will be explored. The Bible is also clear that when God calls individuals to ministry, God endows those individuals with the gifts and talents necessary to answer that call, so this manual will talk about the gifts of the Spirit, and will provide tools for discerning and developing those gifts. In addition, there are other resources in the appendices, including a list of supplementary reading and online suggestions, a literature review of some of these materials, and some ideas about how the contents of this manual might be useful in training purposes. This is not a prescribed training program, but rather some suggestions to help get a church started and spark additional ideas. Finally, because the work of lay ministry is diverse and those called to this ministry are often under-prepared, this manual will provide information and resources for some of the skills and duties required.

In addition, it is important to recognize that there are a diversity of generations and learning styles found in the church today. There are some who remain linear learners and prefer printed manuals on bookshelves and in church libraries. There are others, however, who have grown up in the technology age and are more comfortable with electronic formats and online availability. These divergent preferences can present

further challenges for churches that endeavor to provide resources and training for multi-generational deacons' and elders' groups. If only one preference is met, then the gap in understanding and training will continue to exist with at least some of the lay leaders of the church. This would not be beneficial for the church, so this manual will address itself as a resource to both preferences. There will, eventually, be a published version of the manual for those deacons and elders who prefer to turn pages, as well as an electronic version, in the form of a website, for those who prefer to download their information from computers or smartphones.

The overall premise of this manual is that the primary responsibility of lay ministers, including those named deacons and elders, is to serve God, the church, others and themselves in the name of Christ, and that when this responsibility is met, the concerns and struggles of the local church and the world can be successfully addressed. The goal of this manual, then, is to inform and prepare elders and deacons by offering them an understanding, from a biblical perspective, of the origins, roles and qualifications of deacons and elders, by educating them about their calling to serve, and by equipping them as lay ministers for the ministry of shepherding and pastoral care. The belief of this manual is that from the days of the First Century Christian Church, elders and deacons have had a calling to serve; and the hope of this manual is that it will, in both print and electronic form, become a springboard for the growth and development of both churches and lay ministers, enabling them to answer God's call to a ministry of service, a ministry that has the potential to heal the world, enrich the church, build the Kingdom, and glorify God.

CHAPTER 1. BIBLICAL BEGINNINGS

Origin of Elders

The role of the elder is an ancient and well-respected one. It pre-dates the existence of the Christian church, and has roots in cultures and nations beyond the Israelites. It is not surprising, then, that the apostles and early Christians drew upon such a rich and well-known tradition as they sought to create the structure of the church. Understanding the origin of this position can broaden the understanding of contemporary elders, as well as offer them a solid foundation upon which to develop their gifts and ministry. They are heirs to this great history, and, as Gary Straub has so aptly stated, they “are part of the living tradition of faithful persons who keep saying yes to the heart of God.”¹

Eldership is the most ancient of all forms of leadership in the church, dating back to the prominence and leadership of the elder men in tribal customs. Elders are known to have been relied upon in Egypt, as well as among the Moabites and Midianites. In fact, the first Old Testament reference to elders as a position of authority is found in Exodus 18, where Moses’ father-in-law, Jethro, the priest of Midian, suggested that Moses appoint men to assist him in the wilderness. The scripture does not specifically call the men elders, but the responsibilities they are entrusted with identify them with this role. Ancient Greece and the Roman Empire utilized elders as well, so it is not difficult to see how the position came to be adopted in Israelite and later Jewish society as well.

The term “elder” originally referred to the advanced years of the men recognized in the position. As *The Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible* points out, “The Hebrew

¹ Gary Straub, *Your Calling as an Elder* (St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2003), 6.

word in Ezekiel, *בִּישׁ*, is derived from the root meaning “chin” or “beard.”² An elder, therefore, by definition, was a man whose advanced age had allowed him to grow a full beard. In the tribal culture, a man’s age generally afforded him experience and wisdom, which enabled him to guide and judge those younger. The responsibilities of tribal elders, then, tended to be two-fold. They were to employ their age and wisdom in discipline and judgment, as well as in ruling and guiding. Even in today’s society, there are age requirements, whether written or assumed, for most positions of leadership and authority.

Following Moses’ selection of the elders in the wilderness (Exod 18:21-26), which is later recounted in Deuteronomy 1:9-18, the position of elder continued to be utilized within Israelite and Jewish society. As synagogues were established after the Babylonian exile, each one appointed elders, who functioned as leaders within the community. Elders also were convened into a Council of Elders in Jerusalem. This council was also known as the Sanhedrin. As valuable as elders were, however, they are not portrayed favorably in the Gospel accounts, because many of the religious leaders who pursued and persecuted Jesus were members of the Sanhedrin. Despite this negative image, the fledgling Christian church chose to make use of elders as they developed their organizational and governing structure.

The first mention of Christian elders is found in Acts 11:30, which speaks of the believers in Antioch sending gifts to the elders of the church in Jerusalem through Barnabas and Saul. In addition, elders are mentioned along with the apostles as part of the governing council in Jerusalem that Paul and Barnabas appealed to in the debate

² George Arthur Buttrick, ed., *The Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible*, vol. E-J (New York, NY: Abingdon Press, 1962), 72.

regarding whether circumcision was a necessary requirement to becoming a Christian (Acts 15:2). The account of Paul summoning the elders of the church in Ephesus in Acts 20:17, as well as the references to elders in other epistles of Paul, Peter, and James present clear evidence that elders were an important aspect of the Christian church. This evidence provides contemporary elders with a sense of orientation, as well as a witness to the work that God is calling them to today. They are part of a long and rich tradition, and they are called, as elders before them, to offer sound judgment and guidance within the church.

Before moving on, it is worth noting that in nearly every reference to elders in the New Testament, the title is used in the plural, indicating that there was a plurality of elders, rather than singular leadership. Not only does this follow upon the ancient and Old Testament traditions, it is also beneficial in establishing the most diverse and balanced structure for leadership and authority in the church, back in the New Testament and today as well. A plurality of elders provides greater support and accountability among those who serve, and it also ensures that there is a variety of gifts and perspectives involved in the exercise of authority and leadership. The elders are able to complement one another's weaknesses, and guarantee that the many needs of the church will be met. The Bible does not dictate how many elders should be appointed, but it does clearly demonstrate that, in both the Old and New Testaments, elders served as a group.

Elders, Overseers and Bishops

A careful study of the many passages that speak about elders in the Bible can produce more questions than answers. This is because there are three terms that are used,

“elder,” “overseer” and “bishop,” each appropriately translated from three different words in the original Greek. Taken separately, this can be a confusing puzzle to sort out, but, fortunately, this effort is not necessary. The majority of scholars and commentary writers agree that these three separate titles were used interchangeably of the single position that is known now as an elder. An awareness of these three terms, however, is useful, not only in clarifying the scriptural accounts, but also in creating a fuller understanding of the role and responsibilities of today’s elders.

The first and perhaps best case for the argument that the titles “elder,” “overseer” and “bishop” are all referring to the same position in the church is found in the interchangeable use of the terms by the biblical writers. For example, in Acts 20:17, Luke tells of Paul summoning the elders from the church in Ephesus to meet him at the end of his third missionary journey. He writes, “From Miletus he sent a message to Ephesus, asking the *elders* of the church to meet him (emphasis mine).”³ Then, recounting Paul’s words to these same elders in verse 28 he writes, “Keep watch over yourselves and over all the flock, of which the Holy Spirit has made you *overseers*, to shepherd the church of God that he obtained with the blood of his own Son (emphasis mine).” It is unlikely that Paul sends for one group of church leaders and then addresses another, and it is also doubtful that Luke was mistaken as he recorded this important meeting for the church. What is probable, however, is that Luke uses both the terms “elders” and “overseers” in his account of the event because he considered both to refer to the same group of people.

³ Unless otherwise noted, the translation used throughout this thesis is the New Revised Standard Translation.

Another such example is found in the instructions given to Titus for his work in Crete. In Titus 1:5 he is told, “I left you behind in Crete for this reason, so that you should put in order what remained to be done, and should appoint *elders* in every town, as I directed you (emphasis mine),” and then two verses later in verse 7 he is informed, “For a *bishop*, as God’s steward, must be blameless; he must not be arrogant or quick-tempered or addicted to wine or violent or greedy for gain (emphasis mine).” If Titus’ primary responsibility in Crete was to appoint elders, it would make little sense to confuse his instruction by listing the qualifications for a completely different office. Only if the use of “elder,” “overseer” and “bishop” were interchangeable and referred to the same position does this apparent discrepancy make sense.

In addition, a careful reading of the pastoral epistles reveals that there are biblical qualifications given for elders in 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and in Titus 1:6-9, and for deacons in 1 Timothy 3:8-13, but there are no qualifications given for overseers or bishops. This seems odd if the roles of the overseer and bishop were as important in the life of the church as the scriptural references indicate. As Benjamin Merkle points out in his book, *Why Elders?*, “If elder and overseer are two separate offices, then it would seem reasonable to expect Paul to give the necessary qualifications for each office.”⁴ It is also interesting to note that nowhere in the New Testament are the three offices of deacon, elder and overseer mentioned together. Deacons and elders appear, but the three are never referred to collectively.

Other early church writings from the first century, including 1 Clement and the Didache use the terms interchangeably as well, and, as Merkle further indicates, “Not

⁴ Benjamin L. Merkle, *Why Elders? A Biblical and Practical Guide for Church Members* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2009), 20.

until the second century- in the epistles of Ignatius- do we see a distinction between the overseer (i.e., the monarchical bishop) and the elders (i.e., presbytery).”⁵ All of this, coupled with the evidence that all three roles were responsible for ruling and teaching, points to the conclusion that, at least in the New Testament church, elders, overseers and bishops were simply different titles used for the same position of leadership within the church.

So how did one position come to have three titles associated with it? To begin with, an investigation of the original Greek reveals that each of the words reflected a different aspect of the role. “πρεσβύτερος” (presbuteros), which is translated as “elder,” described the leaders as they were, and referred to the spiritual maturity of the role, whereas “ἐπίσκοπος” (episkopos), which is translated as “overseer” and sometimes “bishop,” described their function, and referred to their responsibility for overseeing the life and work of the church. There is also evidence to suggest that Jewish Christians tended toward the use of “elder,” because it was familiar from their Old Testament structure, while Gentile Christians preferred the term “overseer.” Regardless of how it came to be, however, there is ample proof that the terms are interchangeable. Furthermore, as Merkle asserts “Leadership in the church is not about acquiring titles but about becoming a servant.”⁶ While an understanding of the biblical terms is important in order to fully grasp the wisdom and guidance the writers provided, the truth is that biblical leadership, such as Jesus demonstrated, is humble, servant leadership, so it does not really matter what title is used.

⁵ Merkle, *Why Elders?*, 22.

⁶ Merkle, *Why Elders?*, 25.

Qualifications of Elders

The saying is sure: whoever aspires to the office of bishop desires a noble task. Now a bishop must be above reproach, married only once, temperate, sensible, respectable, hospitable, an apt teacher, not a drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, and not a lover of money. He must manage his own household well, keeping his children submissive and respectful in every way— for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how can he take care of God’s church? He must not be a recent convert, or he may be puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil. Moreover, he must be well thought of by outsiders, so that he may not fall into disgrace and the snare of the devil. (1 Tim 3:1-7)

I left you behind in Crete for this reason, so that you should put in order what remained to be done, and should appoint elders in every town, as I directed you: someone who is blameless, whose children are believers, not accused of debauchery and not rebellious. For a bishop, as God’s steward, must be blameless; he must not be arrogant or quick-tempered or addicted to wine or violent or greedy for gain; but he must be hospitable, a lover of goodness, prudent, upright, devout, and self-controlled. He must have a firm grasp of the word that is trustworthy in accordance with the teaching, so that he may be able both to preach with sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict it. (Titus 1:5-9)

It is true, as the later chapters will explore, that all Christians are called to some form of ministry, but not all Christians are called to be elders. Today, as in the early days of the church, spiritual leaders need to be carefully chosen. These leaders are not only entrusted with the guidance and governance of the church, but they are also living representatives of the faith. It is important, therefore, that those chosen to lead be selected based on established and carefully considered guidelines. Fortunately, the forefathers of the Christian church, including Paul and the apostles, understood this necessity and have imparted the qualifications they utilized through the scriptures. When it comes to the position of elder, there are a number of characteristics that a church should look for in a candidate before elevating them to this position of leadership and authority.

To begin with, the letter to Timothy states that whoever aspires to be an elder (bishop) desires a noble task. While not a qualification in itself, this statement precedes the list of qualifications and sets the tone for why they are important. As already discussed, the leaders of the church are also representatives of the church, and in the early days of Christianity, before the church was recognized and sanctioned by the state, this also meant that, in times of persecution, the leaders were often singled out and arrested first. Service as an elder in the church was a noble task, therefore, and one that required a noble person, because in both their life, and possibly also their death, they embodied the teaching and essence of the faith. Today's elders also stand as representatives of the faith, and, while persecution is less prevalent in the United States, it is still a noble task. It is still good when an individual aspires to be an elder, because those who are eager to serve, provided that they meet the necessary qualifications, will serve willingly and enthusiastically, and will epitomize the best of the Christian faith to others.

In terms of qualifications, the letters to both Timothy and Titus make it clear that an elder must be "above reproach" (1Tim 3:1; Titus 1:5, 7), or, as some translations put it, "blameless." This seems to be the chief characteristic for an elder, so much so that the letter to Titus lists it twice, which is not surprising, since being above reproach was a common qualification for many prominent offices in antiquity. Being above reproach, or blameless does not mean that elders need to be perfect, or without fault, which is good, because, since no one would ever meet this first qualification, the church would be left without leadership. This requirement does call for a high standard, however, and insists that elders should have no glaring blemishes in their morality or character, and that their conduct should be free from any obvious defects that would cause them to bring shame

upon themselves or the church. This makes sense considering the role of the elder as both a spiritual leader and representative of the church. Coupled with this is the requirement found in 1 Timothy 3:7 that elders must be “well thought of by outsiders.” It was important, especially in the early days of the church that the leaders have good reputations, that they were not phony or hypocritical, or act in a way that would cause them to be disgraced. Their standing in the community needed to be nearly unimpeachable, so they would not be open to attack or criticism. Damage to the reputation of a church leader, both then and now, also damages the church they serve and the faith they stand for. As Benjamin Merkle points out, “‘Outsiders,’ or non-Christians, often seem to be better judges of character than those in the church.”⁷ There are many people outside the church who are waiting to point fingers and criticize. As long as the elders of the church are known for their integrity, rather than their faults, these potential critics will continue to wait.

Almost as though offering a guide to being well thought of by others, the letter to Timothy also states that elders must be “respectable” (v. 2), which means that they should have good behavior. The Good News translation uses the term “orderly,” which further expands this characteristic to include the need for the elder to exercise appropriate boundaries in both their life and service. Being orderly and respectable can also incorporate the ability to remain in control in the midst of chaos, a trait that can be especially helpful in churches of any age. The letter to Titus lists a similar qualification, that of needing to be “upright” (v. 8). Being upright means being just and fair-minded; it involves living according to God’s Word, showing respect for all people and giving reverence to God. An elder who is upright is one who sticks by their word and practices

⁷ Merkle, *Why Elders?*, 69.

what they preach. This is an important quality for all Christians, but especially for those considered spiritual leaders, as elders are.

Another important characteristic for an elder is that they be what 1 Timothy calls “temperate” (v. 2) and Titus calls “self-controlled” (v. 8). An elder who is temperate and self-controlled will have the ability to exercise appropriate restraint. They will be well-disciplined with regard to their actions and appetites, and will be cool and collected, regardless of the situation. This can be a key qualification, because if an individual cannot govern themselves, how can they be trusted to govern the church? This choice of the word “temperate” seems to echo this sentiment, because it is derived from a word that signifies strength and indicates someone who has power over their thoughts, actions and desires. This quality is cultivated through a connection with God, and as Gary Staub explains, “The ability to simply ignore the door when temptation knocks is an enormous grace, but letting Christ answer the door may be an even greater grace.”⁸ A truly temperate, self-controlled elder is one who lets Christ answer the door.

An elder is also “sensible” (1Tim 3:2) and “prudent” (Titus 1:8). This means that they are sober-minded and discreet. They have a sound mind and are able to think clearly about a situation and what is appropriate at any given time. They are serious when necessary, and, while a sense of humor is also a wonderful trait, a sensible and prudent elder will understand that when people are hurting and in crisis, it is not a time for jokes. This qualification is important, because fulfilling it means that a person has the ability to make good decisions and exercise balanced judgment, that they can wisely control their instincts and will honor the dignity of others in all circumstances. Their attitude will not be “all about me,” but rather will be mindful of those around them and their needs.

⁸ Staub, *Your Calling as an Elder*, 12.

Being mindful of the needs of others is also a component of the qualification of being “hospitable,” which is also found in both letters (1 Tim 3:2 & Titus 1:8). Being hospitable is a biblical virtue that can be found throughout the Bible. It was also a vital quality in the early church, because practicing hospitality meant that traveling Christians would be welcomed with open hearts and given an open house for lodging, and since inns in the first century were notoriously dirty, expensive and immoral, this openness was important. Someone who was hospitable was a lover of strangers and a friend to those in need. Lawrence Eyres captures the essence of this characteristic well when he says that “The hospitable man is one whose heart is first open to the lonely, the rejected, the alien among men of all kinds and in all conditions.”⁹ Certainly this is as critical a qualification for an elder today as it was in the days of the early church.

The letter to Titus also stipulates that an elder should be “devout” and “a lover of goodness” (v. 8). Being devout has also been translated as holy or reverent. It involves taking seriously the process of personal sanctification, not engaging in spiritual narcissism, and being dedicated to God, no matter what people think. This might seem to be assumed for someone who serves as a spiritual leader within the church, but the sad truth is that there are many who do not practice what they preach and who, like the Pharisees of Jesus’ day, like to play the part, but are not really committed to God in their hearts. An elder who is a lover of goodness (some translations say “a lover of men”) is someone who embraces all that is wholesome and positive. They love everything, everyone and every action that is good. A lover of goodness is someone who William Barclay describes as an individual “whose heart answers to the good in whatever person,

⁹ Lawrence R. Eyres, *The Elders of the Church* (Philadelphia, PA: The Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1975), 30.

in whatever place and in whatever action he finds it.”¹⁰ Certainly, this is a vital characteristic for an elder in the church, because all that is good is from God who is good, and one who loves the good in all can also point others to that good, and God as well.

The letter to Timothy also calls for elders to be “apt teachers” (v. 2), and the letter to Titus takes this requirement one step further by stating that an elder should have “a firm grasp of the Word,” so that they are not only able to teach/ “preach with sound doctrine,” but “refute those who contradict it” as well (v. 9). This is the only qualification that directly points to the duties of an elder in the church. Being required to have the ability to teach and teach well clearly indicates that elders are called to teach, in one way or another, in the church. This does not mean that all elders are called to preach, as preaching is only one form of teaching, but it does mean that elders are not intended to sit idly back in the pews as others shoulder the teaching responsibilities. An elder’s teaching duties, as the qualifications indicate, are then two-fold. They need to be able to teach and build up healthy doctrines, but also to recognize and refute false teaching and correct unhealthy doctrines. Teaching is essential in the church, as it is the primary way that Christians learn and grow in their faith, so the elders’ ability to teach is quite significant.

In addition to the “positive” qualifications of what an elder should be, both letters also list several “negative” characteristics that an elder should not possess. One that is found in 1 Timothy is that an elder must not be a “recent convert” (v. 6). This qualification is understandable given the leadership and authority that is entrusted to elders in the church. When critical decisions need to be made and actions taken, it is

¹⁰ William Barclay, *The Letters to Timothy, Titus and Philemon, revised edition* (Philadelphia, PA: The Westminster Press, 1975), 238.

important to have someone in control who is spiritually mature and experienced. This is understandable, but there is even another reason given for the qualification. The letter says that an elder must not be a recent convert, because a novice in such a position within the church may become “puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil” (v. 6). In other words, a recent convert can easily fall victim to the temptation of pride. This would cause them to think too greatly of themselves at the expense of their responsibilities to the church. Of course, pride is a temptation all Christians face, but a recent convert is at much greater risk than someone who has grown and matured in their faith, because they do not yet understand their own weaknesses and the temptations they are most prone to. It can be sometimes difficult to find qualified individuals to serve as elders, and the church may be persuaded to overlook this requirement. Such a decision may prove costly, and it would be wiser to make do with less in the short term and take the time to train someone who is a good candidate for eldership, than to fill a quota with a person who is not ready and suffer long term consequences.

Both 1 Timothy and Titus also insist that an elder cannot be a “drunkard” (1 Tim 3:3) or “addicted to wine” (Titus 1:7). This does not mean that drinking is forbidden, but rather that when elders drink they need to remain mindful of their position and responsibility to those they serve. This issue is important, not only for the reasons of outside judgment as discussed above, but also because an elder’s ministry involves being entrusted with confidences, and these confidences cannot be compromised, lest the trust of those who are ministered to be betrayed and lost. It is a well-known medical fact that over-indulgence in alcohol has a physiological effect on people, including the loss of normal inhibitions, both in terms of action and speech. An elder who is addicted to wine

runs the dangerous risk of becoming intoxicated and sharing confidential information about members of the church. Regardless of who this information is shared with, the consequences could be costly, including the fact that trust would be lost. The confidences entrusted to leaders of the church need to be considered sacred, and anything that could cause them to be breeched should be intentionally avoided. This involves not only wine and alcohol, but any addiction that is unchecked and untreated and that can compromise the person's thinking, actions and decisions and lead to a lack of vigilance, or other outrageous conduct.

It is also important that an elder not be "violent" (Titus 1:7), but, as 1 Timothy adds, "gentle" (v. 3). The word "violent" literally means "a striker," and involves being given to holding grudges and having a chip on one's shoulder. This requirement speaks not only to physical violence, but also to emotional and spiritual violence, such as can occur as elders lead and teach within the church. Bullying is an example of emotional and spiritual violence, and elders are called instead to be gentle and peaceable individuals, who do not retaliate, but rather seek to honor the worth of the person in every circumstance.

Closely tied to this characteristic is another that states that elders should not be "quarrelsome" (1Tim 3:3) or "quick-tempered" (Titus 1:7). This qualification is not about anger itself, because anger is not necessarily bad. Jesus demonstrated righteous anger on numerous occasions. The anger referred to here as being quarrelsome and quick-tempered is anger that is selfish or unfounded, and anger that is nourished against another. This type of anger is not helpful, and elders need to be those who seek to deal peaceably with issues, rather than adding to them. The letter to Titus further stipulates

that an elder “must not be arrogant” (v. 7), which means that they should not be someone who is stubbornly self-willed, overbearing or pushy. An arrogant individual is intolerant of others and insists on their own way, rather than seeking the best for others. This type of person will destroy the church, not build it up as elders are called to do. A “my way or the highway” control freak will not make for a good elder.

The final characteristic that an elder should not possess is being “a lover of money” (1 Tim 3:3), or “greedy for gain” (Titus 1:7), which is generally interpreted as involving money, but can also include possessions. This means that an elder is someone who is not money-hungry and cannot be bought. An elder who becomes ensnared in the love of money or worldly possessions can easily be enticed to compromise their loyalties and integrity. Also, in some churches today, elders are entrusted with the offerings and finances of the church, and an individual who is motivated by greed will be tempted to steal some of the money. Judas is an excellent example of this. In John 12:1-8, Mary of Bethany anointed Jesus’ feet with “a pound of costly perfume made of pure nard” (v. 3), and Judas complained that the perfume should have been sold and the money given to the poor. His protest might seem reasonable enough, until the Gospel writer continues with the information that Judas “said this not because he cared about the poor, but because he was a thief; he kept the common purse and used to steal what was put into it” (v. 6). Even if an individual is not prone to stealing, their greed could still impair their judgment, adversely influencing their decisions, and cause them to disregard the needs of another in favor of their own agenda. For these reasons, not being greedy for money or possessions continues to be an important qualification for elders.

The final set of qualifications center around an elder's domestic life. Both letters insist that an elder's children must be "submissive and respectful" (1 Tim 3:4), as well as "believers" (Titus 1:6). To this, 1 Timothy adds the requirement that an elder "must manage (their) own household well" (v. 4) and Titus includes the condition that the children should not be "accused of debauchery and not rebellious" (v. 6). It is clear that the early church believed that the characteristics of a person's home life served as an indication of their ability to lead. 1 Timothy confirms this belief in verse 5 by asking the question, "if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how can he take care of God's church?" Christian service, like the Christian faith itself, is not confined to the church, but rather extends to every aspect of a person's life, and the training ground for elders is in the home as well as in the church. If an elder cannot effectively teach their children about the faith and lead them in the ways of a Christian life, they are unlikely to be able to teach and lead the members of the church either.

In addition, 1 Timothy insists that an elder must be "married only once" (v. 2). This does not mean that single people are ineligible from becoming elders, nor does it necessarily exclude someone who is remarried, although some churches have specific directives regarding divorce. Instead, the qualification of being married only once is a warning against polygamy and a requirement that elders demonstrate loving fidelity in marriage. This qualification was likely the result of men in the first century being able to divorce their wives on a whim; and in today's fast-track divorce culture, it seems just as applicable. Marriage, like the Christian's relationship with God, involves a covenantal commitment, and if an individual cannot be faithful in their human covenants, then it is probable that they will also not be faithful in their covenant with God. The church, then

and now, is in need of elders who are faithful, and whose lives teach others as much about being a Christian as their words do. Careful consideration of and adherence to the biblical qualifications will guide today's churches to appoint elders whose lives and ministry will do just that.

Women as Elders

A final issue regarding elders that is important to discuss is that of gender requirements. Unlike the requirements for deacons, as will be addressed later, the Bible does not say anything specifically about the gender of elders. This may be because, at the time the Bible was written, there were no women serving as elders, at least not by title. Much has changed, however, since these biblical origins, leaving churches today with the question of whether the Bible supports women serving as elders. Absent any definitive biblical word on the subject, denominations and churches have studied the scriptures and adopted what they believe is the correct answer to this question. Their practices, then, are based on their interpretations of particular scriptures, and these individual interpretations have resulted in significant divergences in opinions and practices regarding elders. The following section presents an exploration of some of the scriptures that speak to this important, yet sometimes controversial matter.

Two scriptures that seem to offer clear instruction regarding women in the church are 1 Timothy 2:11-12 and 1 Corinthians 14:34-35, so these scriptures present a good starting point for this exploration. The first letter to Timothy was written to Timothy to instruct him regarding his work in the church in Ephesus. It is evident from the start of the letter that there are problems in the church, namely the spread of false doctrines.

I urge you, as I did when I was on my way to Macedonia, to remain in Ephesus so that you may instruct certain people not to teach any different doctrine, and not to occupy themselves with myths and endless genealogies that promote speculations rather than the divine training that is known by faith. (1 Tim 1:3-4)

It is with an understanding of this mission that this oft-quoted scripture regarding women must be read: “Let a woman learn in silence with full submission. I permit no woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she is to keep silent (1 Tim 1:11-12).” Equipped with the knowledge of Timothy’s purpose in Ephesus, as well as the awareness that women held such a low status in both Jewish and Greek societies that they were not permitted to be educated in the synagogue or individually by rabbis, the writer’s instruction that women not be permitted to teach is reasonable. If the church was already having troubles with false doctrine, which had been taught by men, and were trying to correct the misleading teaching, it would have been counterproductive to have uneducated women involved, particularly when their testimony was considered practically useless in society.

Taken in this context, the preceding direction that women “learn in silence and with full submission” (v. 11) can be interpreted as meaning that, since they had not been trained in the scriptures as men had, the women should devote themselves to learning, rather than teaching. The emphasis in this verse is usually on the apparent rebuke to silence and submission, but the fact that the writer is instructing the women to learn, regardless of the manner, reveals that his true purpose may have been encouragement, not chastisement. Additionally, since there is evidence of women in leadership roles elsewhere in the Bible, as will be discussed later in this section, it is entirely possible that

the guidance for women to learn was intended to prepare them for teaching roles within the church in the future.

This letter was written for a particular situation in a specific historical context. It clearly contains guidelines for Timothy to use in straightening out the problems in the church in Ephesus; and while the letter as a whole may contain some spiritual and practical truths, aspects of the letter, including the verses in question, need to be read as they were originally written. As scholar and commentary writer, William Barclay, explains, “All the things in this chapter are mere temporary regulations to meet a given situation.”¹¹ As understandable as the instruction is in its original context, this direction is not equally applicable today; and, as Barclay insists, “We must not read this passage as a barrier to all women’s service within the Church, but in the light of its Jewish and its Greek background.”¹² This scripture should not be interpreted as a universal statement on the required practices of the Christian Church any more so than a later part of the letter in 1 Timothy 6:1, which reads, “Let all who are under the yoke of slavery regard their masters as worthy of all honor, so that the name of God and the teaching may not be blasphemed” should. The church does not hold this, or any of the other numerous scriptures that are supportive of slavery as authoritative for today’s practices, and the same rationale that has been applied to the biblical references to slavery needs to be applied to the scriptures referring to the role of women in the church as well.

The scripture from 1 Corinthians 14:34-35, which reads “women should be silent in the churches. For they are not permitted to speak, but should be subordinate, as the law also says. If there is anything they desire to know, let them ask their husbands at home.

¹¹ Barclay, *The Letters to Timothy, Titus, and Philemon*, 68.

¹² Barclay, *The Letters to Timothy, Titus, and Philemon*, 69.

For it is shameful for a woman to speak in church.” is often used as a supporting text for the argument in 1 Timothy, but should have the same contextual knowledge applied to it. In addition, it is important to understand that Corinth was a Greek city that was known for its wealth and for the immoral and selfish habits of its people. Drawing upon this historical awareness of the Corinthian culture, William Barclay states about Paul’s writing of this letter that “In all likelihood what was uppermost in his mind was the lax moral state of Corinth and the feeling that nothing, absolutely nothing, must be done which would bring upon the infant Church the faintest suspicion of immodesty.”¹³

The particular concerns of these specific churches aside, the Bible does contain evidence that women were allowed to serve in positions of leadership and authority, and while there is no place where they are actually called “elders,” there is scriptural support of them assuming the responsibilities often associated with elders, including teaching, oversight and discipline. To begin with, Priscilla, or Prisca, as her name is sometimes translated, is mentioned four times in various letters with her husband, Aquila (Acts 18:26, Rom 16:3, 1 Cor 16:19 and 2 Tim 4:19), and in all but one of those instances (1 Cor 16:19), her name is listed first, which would have been unusual given the cultural norms of the day, and could indicate that she assumed a priority role in their responsibilities. One of those responsibilities involved teaching, as Acts 18:26 makes clear, “He (Apollos) began to speak boldly in the synagogue; but when Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they took him aside and explained the Way of God to him more accurately.” Not only does the scripture say that Priscilla, a woman, gave instruction to a man, but there is an indication that she corrected some of his erroneous or incomplete

¹³ William Barclay, *The Letters to the Corinthians* (Edinburgh, Scotland: The Saint Andrew Press, 1962), 152.

understanding as well. This account stands in sharp contrast to a universal interpretation of 1 Timothy 2:11, and it also supports the cultural and contextual qualifiers discussed above.

In terms of the oversight and disciplinary responsibilities of elders there is nothing specific mentioned in the Bible. What is clearly indicated, however, is that many house churches were led by women, including Chloe (1 Cor 1:11), Prisca (1 Cor 16:19), Nympha (Col 4:15) and Apphia (Phlm 2). Leading a house church would have certainly involved some measure of oversight and discipline, and while Prisca and Apphia are also listed with men, who could have assumed these responsibilities, Chloe and Nympha are noted alone, and would probably have borne the tasks themselves. Furthermore, the very mention of these women's names signals that their work was important in these churches, which makes it reasonable to conclude that they were involved, at some level, in the oversight and discipline of their house churches. In addition, there is also evidence that women played key roles outside of house churches in the work of sharing the Gospel, women such as Mary (Rom 16:6), Junia, who is called an apostle (Rom 16:7), Eudia and Syntyche (Phil 4:2-3).

There may be a lack of specific references to the gender requirements of elders, and it may be true that in some situations women were discouraged from assuming certain responsibilities, but overall there is considerable support for women in leadership positions throughout the church, including in the role of elder. Excluding women from serving as elders today is not only shortsighted, but it can also be detrimental to the church. As contemporary theologian, John Ortberg contends,

Given the almost universal sexism of first-century settings, the preaching and ruling of women might then have been scandalous and detrimental to

the preaching of the gospel. Today the situation is precisely reversed. It is the exclusion of women—often done with lofty and humorless reassurances that they are equal even if subordinate—that is scandalous and enervating.¹⁴

In addition, since the Bible makes it clear that it is God, not man who gives the gifts of the Spirit, which are used for ministry and the building up of the church (Eph 4:7, 11-13), to prohibit women from sharing their God-given gifts is to rob the church of some of what God has endowed it with. Bill Hybels, founder and senior pastor of Willow Creek Community Church further expands upon this point when he explains “You learn something from being a mom that you don’t learn from being a dad. You experience something as a little girl growing up in church that you don’t experience as a little boy.”¹⁵ He concludes by asserting that “As church leadership teams, we need to view the church family from the perspective of both genders.... I don’t know how we can do this unless we have both women and men serving in every area of our ministry.”¹⁶ Today’s church needs all whom God has called and equipped to serve as elders, men and women alike.

Origin of Deacons

The heritage of today’s deacons dates back to New Testament times. This does not necessarily add any special privilege or authority to the role of the deacon, but it does add an important dimension to the responsibilities of the diaconate. When we understand better how this leadership position within the church came into being and how the early deacons functioned, it will be clear why deacons have continued to serve the church for

¹⁴ John Ortberg, “Beyond Gender Stereotypes,” in *How I Changed My Mind About Women in Leadership: Compelling Stories from Prominent Evangelicals*, ed. Alan F. Johnson (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010), 194-195.

¹⁵ Bill Hybels, “Evangelicals and Gender Equality,” in *How I Changed My Mind About Women in Leadership: Compelling Stories from Prominent Evangelicals*, ed. Alan F. Johnson (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010), 110.

¹⁶ Hybels, “Evangelicals and Gender Equality,” 110.

most of its roughly two thousand year history. A discussion of the origin of the diaconate will also reveal the importance of fully engaging these leaders in the work of the church today.

To begin with, it is important to understand the meaning of the word “deacon.” Deacon is actually a transliteration, not a translation. It is the Anglicized version of the Greek word “δίακονος” (*diakonos*), which means that the word was simply given an English spelling. In Latin, *diakonos* is translated as “minister,” which can be confusing today given the use of that particular designation for ordained clergy. As will be discussed in the next chapter, however, all Christians are called by God to minister to one another, and especially to those in need, so perhaps a better clarification would be to add a specific qualifier to the definition of a deacon as minister, such as “minister of mercy,” or “minister of service.” The latter definition is particularly good, since the actual English translation of *diakonos* is “servant,” and particularly “table servant,” “waiter,” “runner,” or “messenger.” There are numerous examples in both biblical and non-biblical sources of the word being widely used to speak of those who served food and drink, who were servants to a king, or who generally served one another.¹⁷ This means that the most literal English translation for “deacon” is “servant,” or more appropriately in a Christian context, “servant ministers.”

If the name “deacon” was chosen, and has continued to be used for this particular leadership role in the church, it stands to reason that the primary mission of deacons is to serve the church and those who are connected to it. While reasonable, however, this may cause some individuals to pause, because in many churches from the Congregational and

¹⁷ Walter A. Elwell, Phillip W. Comfort, eds., *Tyndale Bible Dictionary* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2001), 363.

Baptist traditions, deacons today tend to be thought of more as spiritual leaders than humble servants, while in churches from the Presbyterian and Reformed traditions, the role of deacons is closer to being the humble servant. All of these traditions reveal a truth about the diaconate; deacons are spiritual leaders within the church, but their leadership positions are also positions of service. How their spiritual and service responsibilities are specifically defined will be up to the individual church. The fundamental challenge for deacons today is to adopt an understanding of what a deacon is from a biblical perspective, and then to adapt that understanding into the needs of the church today. The biblical evidence indicates that deacons are called to humbly serve the church and its members as spiritually strong servant leaders. In order to translate this evidence into a more complete comprehension of the role and responsibilities of deacons today, it is helpful to explore how it all began.

The seven men chosen to address the situation described in Acts 6:1-7, are believed by many scholars, the first of whom was Irenaeus, the bishop of Lyons (130-200 C.E.), to be the first deacons. Although these men are not specifically called “deacons,” this belief is drawn from the writer’s use of the noun “*diakonos*” in verse 1 and the verb “*diakoneo*” in verse 2. It is impossible to say definitively what the writer’s intentions were, or if these word choices were intended to define the role of deacon as it later came to be recognized in the church. In fact, other scholars have debated that the seven were the church’s first deacons, given the fact that the men were selected for a specific task, and in response to an explicit need. Regardless of whether the seven men chosen in Acts 6:1-7 were actually the first deacons or not, it is fair to say that their service to the ever-growing early church, in the face of the challenges that its growth presented, provided a

model for others to follow. There is conjecture that the success of the “solution of the seven,” as it has been called, spread to other churches outside of Jerusalem, including Greek churches; and that Paul, who likely would have been familiar with the actions of the Jerusalem church, and who was concerned with organization within the church, used this model in the new churches he started. The need for organization in the new churches and the effectiveness of this model clearly had an impact, because as Alexander Strauch points out, “Church history reveals that the diaconate was an intrinsic part of every church throughout the Roman Empire, even in the earliest days of second-century Christianity.”¹⁸ So, regardless of exactly how the early diaconate took shape, we know from both biblical and non-biblical sources that it did.

The first actual mention of deacons as positions within the church is in Philippians 1:1, where Paul greets “all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, with all the bishops and deacons.” It is generally accepted that Paul wrote this letter from prison in either Rome or Caesarea, which dates it to around 60 C.E., and since the deacons were well enough established at that time to be named by position, and since Paul knew of them even in prison, it is likely that the role had existed for some time before that. The most specific reference to deacons is the discussion of qualifications in 1 Timothy 3:8-13, which is explored in greater detail above. These are only two of three total references to deacons in the Bible as a position within the church, the third to be discussed below, and neither give any specifics as to the duties or scope of a deacon’s ministry. Despite this lack, however, there is still more evidence to be gleaned. These two early references to deacons as a position within the church tell us that the church had

¹⁸ Alexander Strauch, *New Testament Deacon: The Church’s Ministers of Mercy* (Littleton, CO: Lewis and Roth Publishers, 1992), 53.

chosen to call that specific role “deacon.” The significance of this is found in the fact that throughout the New Testament, the use of the word “*diakonos*” never really loses its original connection with the meaning of service and, more specifically, the service of supplying material needs. So the early deacons, those who are mentioned both by name and by association, were leaders within the church, who were chosen as a result of their spiritual maturity and commitment, and who exercised their leadership as servants, servant leaders within the church. These early deacons can be considered as the historical forerunners of today’s deacons, who are also called to serve the church as spiritually strong servant leaders.

A discussion of the beginnings of the diaconate would not be complete without touching on the issue of women serving as deacons. There are churches today who adamantly insist that the Bible teaches that only men were and can be called as deacons. There is biblical evidence, however, that women did serve in this role. The most notable example of this can be found in Romans 16:1, where Paul writes “I commend you to our sister Phoebe, a deacon of the church at Cenchreae.” While in this reference, as in every other reference to deacons in the Bible, there is no statement made about Phoebe’s responsibilities as a deacon, there is also no indication that she holds a lesser position than the deacons Paul greets in his letter to the Philippians (1:1).

There are also specific qualifications given in 1 Timothy 3:11 that “women likewise must be serious, not slanderers, but temperate, faithful in all things.” This scripture has been debated, however, because some scholars believe that the word should be translated “wives” and not “women,” which would mean that the qualifications are intended for the wives of male deacons and not for female deacons. While it is true that

the Greek word in question can be translated as either “wives” or “women,” there is no qualifier accompanying the word that would indicate marital relations. Furthermore, the word “likewise” in this verse mirrors the use of the same word in verse 8 where the list of qualifications for deacons begins, following the list of qualifications for elders in verses 1-7. This mirroring indicates that these qualifications are part of a series, in this case, a series of qualifications for church officials, the first being for elders, the second for male deacons, and the third for female deacons.

This evidence of women serving as deacons within the church echoes Jesus’ own call of and recognition for women who played prominent roles in his ministry, as well as the presence of women on the day of Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit was given by God to *all* who were assembled (Acts 2:4) for the work of ministry and the support of the Christian movement, and by other references in New Testament letters to women in leadership roles within the church. There are also non-biblical references to women serving as deacons, including the letter of Pliny the Younger, governor of Bithynia, to Emperor Trajan, which speaks of two female deacons who were tried and killed for their Christian beliefs.¹⁹ Perhaps the most compelling biblical foundation for women serving as deacons, however, and the one that leaves little doubt as to its meaning or interpretation is found in Paul’s letter to the church in Galatia, where he reminds them that “There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer *male and female*; for *all* of you are one in Christ Jesus” (Gal 3:28, emphasis mine). If we are to believe these words, then we are to believe that when we are in Christ we are transformed and made one, that there are no longer any divisions to separate us, but all

¹⁹ John W. Coakley, Andrea Sterk, eds., *Readings in World Christian History: Volume 1 Early Christianity to 1453* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2004), 24.

are united and of equal worth in Christ. The need in the church today is great, and it will require *all* persons whom God has equipped and called as deacons to respond to meet that need. Let us stand in the spirit of Galatians 3:28, and not allow gender to hinder the ministry of the church.

The First “Deacons” Called to Serve

Now during those days, when the disciples were increasing in number, the Hellenists complained against the Hebrews because their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution of food. And the twelve called together the whole community of the disciples and said, “It is not right that we should neglect the word of God in order to wait on tables. Therefore, friends, select from among yourselves seven men of good standing, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may appoint to this task, while we, for our part, will devote ourselves to prayer and to serving the word.” What they said pleased the whole community, and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit, together with Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolaus, a proselyte of Antioch. They had these men stand before the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands on them. The word of God continued to spread; the number of the disciples increased greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests became obedient to the faith. (Acts 6:1-7)

All churches experience “growing pains” and the first church in Jerusalem was no different. Following the birth of the church at Pentecost, the early church began growing rapidly, literally adding great numbers each day. As in any church, this type of rapid growth comes with its challenges as well as its blessings. One of the challenges soon faced by the apostles, who led the church at that time, were complaints from the Greek-speaking Jews that their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution of food and resources. In one sense, the apostles had become victims of their own success. The church had grown too large for them to continue to try to do everything that was needed.

This was a situation that could have easily divided the young church, not simply because some of the widows were being left out, but more importantly because those widows were Greek-speaking Jews, and therefore, foreigners. This situation was ripe with racial tensions, and required immediate, but careful action. An additional challenge inherent in the situation was the fact that, even as the apostles attempted, but were unable to oversee all of the needs of the expanding church, they were, at the same time, neglecting their own priorities of spending time in prayer and teaching the Word of God. The entire situation could have derailed the early church entirely, just as it was beginning to become stable. The apostles needed to act wisely in order to maintain the unity and harmony of the church, and to care for the common good.

The apostles drew upon the collective wisdom of the faith community by calling together all of the disciples in Jerusalem and asking them to choose seven men from among their company. Knowing the gravity of the situation and the importance of the need, however, the apostles wisely laid out clear qualifications for the men who were to be selected, and allowed these men to be chosen by the majority opinion of the community, rather than dictating their own choices, which would have likely further fueled the dissention. The apostles offered their guidance as shepherd leaders of the church by setting forth qualifications for the selection process, and then by trusting the community to make those selections. Their efforts offer today's leaders an important example of exercising godly wisdom, both in the resolution of conflict, and also in the leadership of the church.

The apostles established three criteria that the community would use in determining who would be selected to serve the church by caring for the widows. To

begin with, the seven men to be selected were to be “full of the Spirit” (v. 3). The phrase translated into English as “full of” meant “to be controlled by.” In other words, those who were qualified to be chosen needed to be controlled by the Holy Spirit, rather than by their own self interests, attitudes, or opinions. Being full of the Holy Spirit would have meant that the Holy Spirit was an active presence in their lives, guiding and directing their thoughts, actions and decisions. In short, these were to be men of faith; and this is important, because faith is critical for the ministry that these men, as well as deacons today, are called to fulfill. As Alexander Strauch asserts in his book, *New Testament Deacons*, “Our faith determines our capacity for God’s service.... All that we truly do for God is done according to our faith.”²⁰ The necessity for the faith community to look for men and women who are full of and controlled by the Holy Spirit in their selection of deacons is as important today as it was two thousand years ago.

Another, equally important characteristic laid down by the apostles was that the seven were men who were full of and, therefore, controlled by “wisdom” (v. 3). Just as the apostles exercised wisdom in their handling of the situation that confronted them, so too, those chosen would need to exercise wisdom as they cared for the widows. The situation was potentially explosive and, as mentioned earlier, had the capability to divide, or even destroy the church. The seven men selected would begin their service in the church with the potential to either craft a solution, or further exacerbate the problem. The use of wisdom was critical then, just as it still is today, for effective service and ministry within the church.

Finally, the men to be selected needed to not only possess these qualifications, but they were to be generally known for them as well. The New Revised Standard Version

²⁰ Strauch, *New Testament Deacon*, 153.

says that they were to be “of good standing” (v. 3), which meant that they were to be men of good and honest character. Their reputations needed to testify on their behalf, proclaiming that they were, in fact, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom. This was important, because if their reputations were true, they would be trusted and respected by all of the community, and they would be the right men for the positions. This qualification, too, is just as crucial today as it was in the Jerusalem church. Deacons are entrusted with ministries that involve people’s lives, often at times of great need and vulnerability. If the men and women selected for these positions are not free from scandal and full of integrity, trustworthiness and faithfulness, the entire church can potentially be damaged, rather than helped by their service. It is very important, therefore, that deacons are chosen based, not on their number of years in the church, or on social status, or popular opinion, but rather on being judged to be men and women of good standing, full of the Holy Spirit and of wisdom. Armed with these qualifications, as well as those found in greater detail in the first letter to Timothy, the ministry of the deacons will cause the church of the twenty-first century to increase, just as it did at its beginning.

Qualifications for Deacons

Deacons likewise must be serious, not double-tongued, not indulging in much wine, not greedy for money; they must hold fast to the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience. And let them first be tested; then, if they prove themselves blameless, let them serve as deacons. Women likewise must be serious, not slanderers, but temperate, faithful in all things. Let deacons be married only once, and let them manage their children and their households well; for those who serve well as deacons gain a good standing for themselves and great boldness in the faith that is in Christ Jesus. (1 Tim 3:8-13)

The earlier discussion on the selection of the seven men to oversee the distribution of food and resources to the widows in Acts 6 concluded with an examination of the qualifications set forth by the apostles. While these original seven were not specifically called deacons, the criteria for choosing them can be applied to deacons today. An even more specific list of characteristics for deacons is found in 1 Timothy 3:8-12. This scripture contains only one of three New Testament references to deacons as a position within the church, and is the most explicit of all. As churches consider their selection of deacons today, congregational leaders would be wise to consider the qualifications detailed in this letter, because, as noted above, the ministry of deacons is a serious business within the church, and should not be left to those unprepared for the demands of service.

This list of qualifications for deacons is one part of a much larger guide for all of the leaders in the early church. At the time of the writing of this letter, it is clear that the church had grown and developed to the point that its organizational structure was beginning to take shape, including the presence of different positions and responsibilities, although the letter does not detail what those responsibilities were. For the deacons of the first-century church, there were seven general criteria that should characterize their lives. The first of these criteria is that they were to be “serious” (v. 8). This does not mean that deacons cannot have any fun, but rather than they are to be dignified, esteemed within the community and worthy of respect. To meet this first qualification, a deacon should be someone whose Christian character is worth imitating because they are serious about living a good moral life, serious about being an example for others to follow and, above all, serious about God. To be serious in this respect means that a person is

dedicated to their own spiritual growth through attendance in worship, study of God's Word and commitment to a personal prayer life. This qualification, similar to being full of the Holy Spirit, means that the person is connected to God and, therefore, can be trusted to act in accordance with God's will.

A deacon must also not be "double-tongued" (v. 8) which means that others can depend on what they say, and that they are not prone to lying, manipulation, deceitfulness, or to saying one thing to one person and something else to another. Being double-tongued would call the integrity of the individual into question and cause them to lose the trust of the very people they would be called to lead. Trust is absolutely essential for effective leadership, and for those who are leaders within the church. A lack of trust in them can easily turn into a lack of trust in the church that has called them, and possibly even in God, whom they represent.

This need for trust also accounts for the third characteristic, "not indulging in much wine" (v. 8), which refers to the need for self-control when it comes to alcoholic beverages. This does not mean that a deacon cannot drink, but rather that when they do drink they need to remain mindful of their position and responsibility to those they serve. The reason this issue is so important is that the ministry of a deacon involves being entrusted with confidences, and these confidences cannot be compromised, lest the trust of those who are ministered to be betrayed and lost. It is a well-known medical fact that over-indulgence in alcohol has a physiological effect on people, including the loss of normal inhibitions, both in terms of action and speech. A deacon who is not self-controlled in their use of alcohol runs the dangerous risk of becoming intoxicated and sharing confidential information about members of the church. Regardless of who this

information is shared with, the consequences could be costly, including the fact that trust would be lost. The confidences entrusted to deacons need to be considered sacred, and anything that could cause them to be breeched should be intentionally avoided.

A deacon, further, should not be “greedy for money” (v. 8), which can also include possessions. The meaning of and reason for this qualification is relatively straightforward, especially considering that in the early church, as in some churches today, deacons were entrusted with the finances that were collected and designated for distribution to those in need. If an individual who is motivated by greed is chosen, there would be a temptation for that person to steal some of the money. As discussed earlier in the section on elders, Judas is an excellent example of this. In John 12:1-8, Mary of Bethany anointed Jesus’ feet with “a pound of costly perfume made of pure nard” (v. 3), and Judas complained that the perfume should have been sold and the money given to the poor. His protest might seem reasonable enough, until the Gospel writer continues with the information that Judas “said this not because he cared about the poor, but because he was a thief; he kept the common purse and used to steal what was put into it” (v. 6). Even if an individual is not prone to stealing, their greed could still impair their judgment, adversely influencing their decisions, and cause them to disregard the needs of another in favor of their own agenda. For these reasons, not being greedy for money or possessions continues to be an important qualification for deacons.

A deacon must also “hold fast to the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience” (v. 9). This means that the individual is a firm believer in the Gospel of Christ. The word “mystery” here signifies, not that which cannot be understood, but rather that which is only understood when revealed to a human being by God. If a person is able to hold

fast, or in other words to be committed to the mystery of the faith, it stands to reason that they are able to do so because the mystery has been revealed to them by God. Few people remain committed to something they have no connection to. God's revelation connects us to the mystery of the faith, which is the Gospel of Christ. Deacons are, in addition to everything else, living examples of their faith. If a deacon cannot stand firm on their faith in Christ, they will not be inclined to base their decisions on God's Word, and they will be of little use to the church in persuading others to embrace their faith as well.

The characteristics of a person's domestic life can reveal a great deal about the person themselves. That is why there are also qualifications that center around the deacon's home life. Christian service, like the Christian faith itself, is not confined to the church, but rather extends to every aspect of a person's life. This is not to say that there should not be a healthy balance, or that Christian service should rule over all other facets of life, but rather it is an honest acknowledgement that ministry is not a neat, nine to five commitment, and that, to varying degrees, an individual's family is involved, directly or indirectly, in that ministry. These qualifications, the need for the deacon to be monogamous if involved in a relationship, and the necessity for them to manage their family well (v. 12), are also a reflection of how that person will engage with and manage their responsibilities in ministry. For these reasons, as well as for the consideration of the example the deacons set for others, these qualifications round out the list of criteria for the selection of the diaconate.

There are four additional qualifications listed in the letter that bear mentioning at this point. Verse 11 states that "Women likewise must be serious, not slanderers, but

temperate, faithful in all things.” There has been considerable debate throughout the years and among respected scholars and clergy as to the exact meaning of this verse. Does it refer to the wives of deacons, or is it inferring that women, too, serve as deacons and, therefore, must be qualified? There is a more comprehensive exploration of the role of women as deacons in the previous section on the origin of deacons, so in keeping with that discussion, this verse will be interpreted in its most inclusive sense, which is as stated criteria for female deacons. Note that, while there is a separate list for women, the list itself is essentially the same as those qualifications listed for male deacons. The women are to be serious also, as well as not slanderous, which is remarkably similar to not being double-tongued. They are also to be temperate and able to exercise self control, which presumably means in all their life, including their choices regarding alcohol. Finally, they are to be faithful in all things, which sums up many of the previously discussed characteristics in one simple phrase. Given their side by side inclusion in the letter, as opposed to a separate dedicated list for women, as is found for other roles in the church, it is unlikely that these qualifications are meant to separate male and female deacons, but rather are a reflection of the status and cultural understanding of male and female roles in the first century. The bottom line is that all deacons, male and female alike, must be qualified for their position in ministry and the responsibilities it demands.

As was the case in the selection of the seven in Acts 6, these qualifications need to be tested (v. 10). This testing can be, but is not necessarily a personal examination of the candidate. It can also be the careful consideration of how the individual in question has demonstrated their capability to fill the position and fulfill the related responsibilities

through their personal history, character and past experience, both within and outside the church. This is the responsibility of the church that calls the deacons to this important ministry, and it is a responsibility that should not be taken lightly. Considering the vital role of the deacon in the church, it is essential that the men and women called to serve as deacons live a life that is consistent with Christian teaching, and that includes nothing that would affect their ability to minister to others.

It may not be easy to find the time and energy necessary for determining which women and men in the congregation fulfill these qualifications, and some churches may hesitate to exclude some prominent members due to their lack of certain characteristics, but these realities, while understandable, cannot be allowed to govern the selection process. The criteria detailed above are not only biblical, but are also tested and proven throughout centuries of the Christian Church. The reason that these qualifications are so crucial is that the deacon, as a chosen lay minister of the church, holds a position that others will look to in times of need and as an example to follow. If the individuals selected are not in possession of these essential characteristics, their leadership and example has the potential to adversely affect the faith of other members, especially those who are newer, and to damage the overall witness of the church. As United Church of Christ theologian, Roger Shinn, explains, “Christians are often such poor representatives of the gospel...often when people reject Christ, they are really rejecting his messengers.”²¹ And, “Gandhi often remarked that the idea of Christianity was appealing; it was what he failed to see in the lives of Christians that prompted him to remain a

²¹ Roger Shinn, *Confessing Our Faith, An Interpretation of the Statement of Faith of the United Church of Christ* (Cleveland, OH: United Church Press, 1990), 91.

Hindu.”²² The role and ministry of the deacon is mission-critical to the future of the Christian Church. Just as in the days of the early church, Christians are still charged with the responsibility of continuing the work of Jesus’ ministry and fulfilling his Great Commandment to “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you” (Matt 28:19-20a). The continued success of the Christian Church is dependent upon its witness to the world, both in terms of the examples found in the lives of Christians, and also with regard to those persons that the church chooses as its representatives, including deacons.

The biblical evidence for the roles of both elders and deacons in the church is unmistakable. These positions of church leadership are defined in terms of their origin, dating back to the Old Testament accounts for elders and the early New Testament church for deacons, and they are also delineated by particular qualifications that should be demonstrated in and through the lives of the individuals in those positions. It is clear that God both calls and equips certain individuals to serve the needs of the church. Their specific responsibilities may be determined by the needs of the churches they serve within, but there are universal characteristics that contribute to an understanding of their general duties. There is also a sense that their call to ministry is part of what it means to be a Christian, and that, as lay ministers, they play a dual role as both Christians and Christian leaders. The following chapter will explore the call to ministry that all Christians have in common, as well as the distinction that elders and deacons experience in their call to serve as spiritual leaders within the church. There is also a discussion of

²² Donald E. Messer, *Contemporary Images of Christian Ministry* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1989), 146.

how elders and deacons are empowered by the Holy Spirit to fulfill their ministry of service.

CHAPTER 2. CALLED AND EQUIPPED BY GOD

All Christians Are Called to Ministry

In his treatise, *Appeal to the Nobility of the German Nation* in 1520, Martin Luther declared that “we are all consecrated as priests by baptism.”¹ To undergird this claim, Luther cites 1 Peter 2:9a, “But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people.” From this declaration was born the concept of the priesthood of all believers, the belief that all Christians, not just those who are ordained, are called by God as God’s ministers. The second half of the verse Luther used goes on to explain the purpose of this universal call of all Christians to ministry. 1 Peter 2:9b states that God has called all Christians to this form of servanthood “in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.” All Christians, therefore, are called to be God’s ministers, serving others in God’s name and for God’s glory.

It may be helpful at this point to define what is meant by the word “ministry.” The individual interpretation of the word is fraught with the potential for misunderstanding because the word has become increasingly isolated to the work of ordained clergy. Lay members may accept that they are a part of the overall ministry of the church, but when asked what specific ministry God has called them to, far too many will explain that they are not ordained. This is unfortunate, because it minimizes the potential of lay Christians to serve God in their fullest capacity. It also limits the

¹ Alister E. McGrath, ed., *The Christian Theology Reader, second edition* (Oxford, England: Blackwell Publishers, 2001), 478.

potential of the church to fulfill its mission to the world, because all of the members are not intentionally following their God-given call to ministry.

The word “ministry” comes from the Greek word *diakoneo*, which means “to serve.” By this definition, then, all who serve in Christian love, whether they serve God, the church, or other people, are actually serving in a form of ministry. Later in the first letter of Peter, the writer tells his Christian readers “Like good stewards of the manifold grace of God, serve one another with whatever gift each of you have received” (1 Pet 4:10). Ministry, therefore, is really nothing more than offering service; and this offering of service is not only possible, but is also expected of all who call themselves Christians. Ministry is much more than a job. It is a lifestyle that is intentionally lived following the example of Jesus Christ who, in his own words “came not to be served but to serve” (Mark 10:45).

This universal call of all Christians to ministry is a call to respond to the Greatest Commandments of loving God with everything we have and loving our neighbor as ourselves (Mark 12:30-31), as well as Jesus’ command to love one another as he loved us (John 13:34). In fact, Jesus went on to say that the world would know his disciples, his followers, by the love they held and demonstrated for others. Christian ministry is the call of all Christians to express their love for God by serving others in the same loving manner that Jesus modeled.

Ministry, therefore, is the way Christians represent the presence of God’s love in the world. It truly is a way of life; and because of this, it can and should be practiced in all aspects of a Christian’s life, not only those in and for the church. In his book, *Contemporary Images of Christian Ministry*, Donald Messer explains, “ministry is more

than just a call to do something; it is a challenge to be someone who loves and cares.”²

All followers of Jesus are called to a ministry, not necessarily an ordained clerical ministry, but a ministry of God “to be someone who loves and cares” nonetheless. The truth, as contemporary theologian, Daniel Migliore, believes, is that “whatever one’s job or profession, as a Christian one is called to be a partner in God’s mission in the world.”³

This is certainly the belief that Jesus reflected when choosing his own disciples, calling fishermen (Mark 1:16-20), a tax collector (Matt 9:9), a revolutionary (Luke 6:15), and other ordinary people. Jesus called some to leave their homes and families to follow him (Matt 4:18-22), while others he called to a ministry right where they were (John 4:39; Luke 8:39), and it is this call to ministry in the midst of ordinary life that Douglas Schuurman is talking about when he writes, “one is not called to be a Christian ‘in general;’ one is called to be a Christian in the concrete social locations one presently occupies, as this mother to these children, this citizen to this country, and so on.”⁴ All persons are called by God, in whose image they are created, to a ministry of service, in which they reflect God’s love and compassion to the world.

Many Christians still have difficulty, however, imagining themselves in ministry. This difficulty is often related to a common, but unwarranted belief that they will not be able to fulfill the ministry they are called to. This belief is unwarranted because it is grounded in a misunderstanding that what a person offers in ministry comes from them. This is not the case. Left to our own resources alone, few, if any of us, would be able to

² Donald E. Messer, *Contemporary Images of Christian Ministry* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1989), 26.

³ Daniel L. Migliore, *Faith Seeking Understanding*, second edition (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2004), 246.

⁴ Douglas J. Schuurman, *Vocation: Discerning Our Callings In Life* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2004), 29.

answer the calls God places before us. Fortunately, however, we are not meant to rely only on what we have to offer in ministry. Instead, we are to fully rely on all that God gives us and equips us with through the Holy Spirit. This provision for ministry will always be all that is needed. As Christians answer God's call to ministry, they need to remember that they minister to others as a result of God's power, not their own, which means that they will have the ability they need to fulfill the ministry they are called to. Their role is to demonstrate the willingness to let God work in and through them.

So, if you are tempted to resist God's call to ministry because you think you do not have what it takes, just remember the following, written by an unknown author.

- Noah was a drunk
- Abraham was too old
- Isaac was a daydreamer
- Jacob was a liar
- Leah was ugly
- Joseph was abused
- Moses had a stuttering problem
- Gideon was afraid
- Samson had long hair and was a womanizer
- Rahab was a prostitute
- Jeremiah and Timothy were too young
- David had an affair and was a murderer
- Elijah was suicidal
- Isaiah preached naked
- Jonah ran from God
- Naomi was a widow
- Job went bankrupt
- Peter denied Christ
- The disciples fell asleep while praying
- Martha worried about everything
- The Samaritan woman was divorced (more than once)
- Zaccheus was too small
- Paul was too religious
- Timothy had an ulcer
- and
- Lazarus was dead!⁵

⁵ "Sermon Forum," Logos Bible Software, <https://sermons.logos.com/submissions/5592-Humor#content=/submissions/5592>, (accessed March 16, 2011).

If you are a Christian, you are called to ministry. God both wants to and is able to use you to your full potential. Your role is to accept God's call, and then to allow God to work through you. When you do so, God will guide you to use your love for God and for others to motivate your service in ministry, to recognize and nurture the gifts God has given you for the purpose of ministry, and to faithfully and lovingly serve in every aspect of your life. If you respond to God's call to ministry, you will be blessed even as God uses you to be a blessing for others.

Elders and Deacons Are Called to a Ministry of Service

It is true that all Christians are called by God to a ministry of some form. There are some men and women, however, who are called as elders and deacons, and theirs is specifically a ministry of service. These individuals are called to serve, both individually, and, at the same time, as members of a group, operating in an organized and official capacity. They are also called to serve the church through the example they set for others. Their role is not primarily a position of honor or authority, although both may characterize an elder or deacon. Rather, they are called to be a servant within the church, partnering with the pastor to live according to the Gospel message and demonstrate God's love by caring for the needs of the congregation.

Depending upon the church and denomination, elders and deacons are often associated with the spiritual needs of the church, but as the earlier chapter has revealed, that was not the original call of the seven men in Acts 6:1-7, the possible forerunners to today's deacons, and neither was it the charge to the men Moses chose to sit and judge the disputes of the Israelites (Exod 18:25-26), believed to be a kin to elders. The Bible is

also clear that Jesus cared for all of the needs of the people who came to him, not just the spiritual ones. So, in following Jesus' example, today's elders and deacons would do well to consider the teaching of St. Ignatius of Loyola, and what he called *cura personalis*. *Cura personalis* is a Latin term that, according to Brian McDermott, S.J., involves three concepts, "treating people as individuals and honoring their unique worth; caring for the 'whole' person (including physical, emotional, intellectual, and spiritual health); and taking into account people's backgrounds, including their family life, nationality, and culture."⁶ This was the heart of St. Ignatius' teaching of the care of the whole person. He recognized that humans were more than simply spiritual beings trapped for a time within the confines of a fleshy body, but that they were, in fact, whole beings, consisting of bodies, minds and spirits. St. Ignatius believed that each of these aspects needed to be cared for, and, following Jesus' own example, this caring for the whole person is the ministry that elders and deacons are called by God to fulfill.

The ministry of elders and deacons, then, is far more complex than simply reading scriptures and assisting the pastor with the worship service. It involves empathetic concern for others, the willingness to spend time listening, caring and being present with those in need, as well as an attitude of humility that enables the deacon to function as a servant leader. This ministry may sound very similar to the ministry of the pastor, and that is not a coincidence. Elders and deacons partner with the pastor in meeting the needs of church members. The lessons from Acts 6 and Exodus 18 are evidence of this. Like Moses and the original apostles, the pastor has a responsibility to represent the people before God and to teach and preach the Word of God. Certainly, pastoral care is also an

⁶ Brian McDermott, S.J., "Jesuit and Catholic Glossary of Terms," Maryland Province of the Society of Jesus, <http://www.ignatianpartners.org/glossary.shtml>, (accessed December 16 2006), 2.

important responsibility of the pastor as well, but the fact remains that there may be many people in need within the church at any one time, and only one, or sometimes two pastors to meet those needs. Often what happens is that the pastor does their best to meet the most pressing needs, but is constrained by time and the need to tend to other responsibilities, such as teaching and preaching the Word, leaving the non-pressing needs of the people to go uncared for within the church. This is not the model Jesus provided for the church to follow, however. Jesus trained his disciples so that they could also care for the needs of the people, because even he was not able to meet all of their needs alone.

Elders and deacons provide loving service to those in need, whether their need is physical, emotional, or spiritual. As Leroy Howe contends in his book, *A Pastor in Every Pew*, “The deepest need all human beings share is the need to be cared about by God and to care about others in God’s name.”⁷ This is the call of the elder and deacon, to serve as ministers of mercy in a world of people in need of care, not only for spiritual concerns, but also for physical and emotional issues as well.

In order to fulfill this ministry effectively, elders and deacons need to adopt an appropriate style of leadership. In general, there are two styles of leadership within the church, positional authority and servant leadership. Positional authority is leadership that relies upon a particular position or title for the influence to lead others. This style of leadership is not terribly effective, especially for lay ministers who, while they do hold a position within the church, are still also members of that church. Positional authority can also be difficult with volunteers, as most church are reliant upon, because volunteers tend to be less concerned about titles or positions and more interested in accomplishing the

⁷ Leroy Howe, *A Pastor in Every Pew: Equipping Laity for Pastoral Care* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 2000), 2.

task at hand. It is not accidental that New Testament discussions of church roles rarely include titles, including Jesus' original disciples, who are simply referred to as "the Twelve." The leaders in New Testament church did not rely upon positional authority, but rather followed Jesus' modeling of servant leadership.

Jesus made it clear to his disciples that greatness in God's Kingdom is achieved by a willingness to serve. When James and John asked to sit on Jesus' right and left when he came into his glory, Jesus used the opportunity to teach all of his disciples that, "among the Gentiles those whom they recognize as their rulers lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants. But," he said, "it is not so among you; but whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all" (Mark 10:42b-43). In Jesus' view, greatness is not rising to the top and having many people below you, as is valued by the world, but rather humbling yourself as a servant and having many people whom you serve. This is the call of each elder and deacon, to follow the teaching and example of Jesus and assume the role of a servant leader within the church.

The Holy Spirit and the Gifts of the Spirit Facilitate Ministry

The ministry that God calls all Christians, including elders and deacons to is ultimately God's ministry, and, as earlier discussed, God has provided all of the necessary resources for that ministry to succeed. These resources can include the family a person is born into, their location, past experiences, cultural background, financial situation, and the list goes on and on. A resource that is all too often overlooked and underemphasized are the gifts God gives to each Christian to equip them for the ministry

they are called to. These gifts are the gifts of the Spirit, and they represent God's empowerment of human ministers, both lay and ordained. In addition, God's Holy Spirit empowers Christians, not only in their spiritual journeys and relationships with God, but also in the individual ministries and purposes God has created each one for. Understanding both the empowerment that comes from the Holy Spirit and the gifts of the Spirit enables all Christians to fulfill the ministries God has called them to.

The gifts of the Spirit that are listed in the Bible can be found listed in Romans 12:6-8 (prophecy, ministry, teaching, exhortation, giving, leading and compassion), 1 Corinthians 12:8-10 (wisdom, knowledge, faith, healing, the ability to work miracles, prophecy, the discernment of spirits, the ability to speak in tongues and the ability to interpret tongues), and Ephesians 4:11 (gifts to be apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers). All of these gifts are given by God, but no one person possesses all of them. In fact, just as each person is unique, so too, the gifts each person has received from God are also unique. This is what Paul means when he says, "each has a particular gift from God, one having one kind and another a different kind" (1 Cor 7:7b). Each person's gifts are unique, but the fundamental purpose of those gifts is the same for all Christians. All gifts of the Spirit are given by God in order to "equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the Body of Christ, until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ" (Eph 4:12-13). This also means that there may be other gifts of the Spirit which are not listed in the Bible, but that have been given by God as the church has grown and developed. The gifts of the Spirit are given, not to complete a checklist, but rather to equip Christians for the ministry and service that God calls them to, so any gift

given by God for such a purpose is, in essence, a gift of the Spirit. This means that, regardless of the particulars of your calling, God has perfectly equipped you to fulfill that calling through the gifts of the Spirit you have received. And, because no other individual has been given the same gifts as you have, no other person is fully equipped to do what God has called you to do.

These differences in Spiritual gifts among Christians are not accidental and should not be allowed to create division, either as a result of jealousy or pride. God has purposely given different gifts to different people, because the greater the differences, the greater the diversity; and the greater the diversity, the greater the strength. When a group of Christians join together, each bringing their own unique Spiritual gifts to the effort, the results will be tremendous, and will greatly advance the mission of the church. Spiritual gifts are the point at which God's power touches our lives for the work of the ministry we are called to. Too many well-meaning Christians attempt to do ministry relying upon their own strength alone. This approach will inevitably lead to frustration and burn-out, because the demands of ministry are more than we are humanly able to accomplish. When we minister from our Spiritual gifts, however, we are drawing upon God's strength, and God is providing the resources we need to complete our mission. This is how God equips us to meet the needs of others, as varied and complex as the ministries to meet those needs may sometimes seem.

It is also important to note that the gifts of the Spirit differ from the talents and skills a person may possess, although these can be useful in the work of ministry as well. A talent is a human ability, and it is often something people are born with, or develop over time. A skill is an ability that has been learned and honed through practice and

sometimes study. A Spiritual gift, on the other hand, is an ability that is only possible as a result of the power of God. In other words, talents and skills have human sources, while Spiritual gifts come from a Divine source.

Even with a Divine source, however, Spiritual gifts still need to be discovered before they can be put to use in the work of ministry. It is the responsibility of every Christian to be vigilant for the Spiritual gifts they have been given. These gifts can be discovered while serving the church, or they may be observed and identified by others, especially those already in leadership positions. Pastors especially should be sensitive to the Spiritual gifts in their congregation. There are also inventory tests that can aid an individual in discovering their Spiritual gifts. This is a good place to start, because the inventory tests not only offer a guide to the possible Spiritual gifts a person may have been given, but they also provide a springboard for thinking about both gifts and the ministries those gifts can facilitate. One such Spiritual gift inventory test is included in Appendix 1 in the back of this manual.

Once a person's Spiritual gifts have been discovered, they need to be nurtured and developed. This is also a responsibility of every Christian, not only because the gift becomes stronger and more powerful as it is developed, but also because the individual becomes more connected with God, who is the source of that strength and power, throughout the nurturing process. Spiritual gifts can be nurtured and developed through study, in prayer, through the example of others, and by using them in the work of ministry. Just like any muscle in the body, the more a Spiritual gift is used, the more it develops and the stronger it will be in the future.

As important as Spiritual gifts are, however, God does not stop at the gifts of the Spirit. God also provides us the opportunity to be filled with the Holy Spirit so that we might be empowered and enabled, as well as equipped for the work of ministry. And, once again, our example to follow is Jesus. While it is true that Jesus is God's son, and therefore, God, the Bible also makes it clear that Jesus willingly emptied himself of his Divinity and became human as we are (Phil 2:7). Then, as Jesus left the carpentry shop to begin his ministry, he made his first stop the Jordan River, where he was baptized by John and received the Holy Spirit, which descended on him in the form of a dove (Luke 3:21-22). The Gospel writer confirms this when, in the following chapter, he writes, "Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness" (Luke 4:1). This is not to say that Jesus did not have the Holy Spirit with him before his baptism in the Jordan, but rather that, just as he made an intentional effort to be filled with the Holy Spirit, we, too, should follow his example and ask God to fill us as well. This is important in all forms of ministry, because the work of the Holy Spirit is not solely individual, but rather extends beyond the individual to reach out to others in love. This becomes clear for us in the words Jesus read to inaugurate his ministry. Having left the wilderness, Jesus returned to Galilee where he began teaching in the synagogues. When he came to his hometown of Nazareth, he was handed the scroll of Isaiah and chose to read, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, *because* he has anointed me to..." (Luke 4:18, emphasis mine). In these words from the prophet, Jesus confirmed that the Holy Spirit comes upon us, lives within us and works through us, not for ourselves alone, but *because* we are being transformed and commissioned to reach out to others, to embody the Good News of God's love in our world, just as Jesus did.

The Holy Spirit empowers Christians to see one another and the world through the love of God. It is as though we are able to see through Christ's eyes, and seeing other people with the eyes of Christ is the first step toward caring for their needs, and those of our world. Being enabled through the Holy Spirit to see people as Jesus saw them enables us to see with the compassion of Christ, regardless of the other person's race, gender, color, ethnic background, sexual identity, or nationality, and view all people as God's creation, all equal as brothers and sisters in God's family. When we are able to see the world in this way, we will truly be ready to succeed in the ministries that God has created us for, called us to, equipped us with Spiritual gifts and empowered us for through the Holy Spirit.

The call to ministry is both universal and specialized. In one sense, ministry, or service to one another is part of what it means to be a Christian in general, but it is also the specific call of some who are called to be spiritual leaders within the church. These leaders, whether they are called elders or deacons, are called by God to a ministry of service. They are to go beyond the common understanding of what it means to be a Christian and to embody a responsibility to care for the church and the people of the church. This is not a call to be taken lightly, nor is it an easy task, or one that elders and deacons often feel qualified for. For these reasons, it is important to understand that those who are called by God are also equipped by God. God's Holy Spirit imparts gifts to all who are called by God to ministry, and the gifts that an individual possesses will enable the successful fulfillment of the ministry they are called to. The responsibility of elders and deacons is to discern their gifts from the Spirit, and then to develop those gifts so they can serve as God calls them to. There are different gifts and different ways of

serving, and it is essential that elders and deacons understand the various aspects of service they are called to. The following chapter will explore four such types of service, and how lay ministers can fulfill their call to each.

CHAPTER 3. A MINISTRY OF SERVICE

Elders and deacons are called, above all else, to a ministry of service. Service can be interpreted and construed in a number of ways, however, so it is beneficial to explore the four primary areas of service that elders and deacons are called to and equipped for. These servant leaders are called to ministries of service to God, to the church, to others and also to their own self. All of these avenues of service are important, and, as complex and unending as their ministry can seem at times, it is critical to the success of the church that each of these areas are given equal weight and attention. Elders and deacons are not meant to be engaged in ministry alone, even though some tasks will require a one-on-one approach. There is a reason that Moses and the apostles called several men, rather than just one, namely because lay ministers need to work together as a team and support one another. Only as a team will they be able to fulfill the calling God has placed before them, the call to a ministry of service.

Service to God

As Jesus passed along the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the sea—for they were fishermen. And Jesus said to them, “Follow me and I will make you fish for people.” And immediately they left their nets and followed him. As he went a little farther, he saw James son of Zebedee and his brother John, who were in their boat mending the nets. Immediately he called them; and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men, and followed him. (Mark 1:16-20)

Jesus began his earthly ministry with an invitation, “follow me,” and ended it with a command, “go.” Walking along the Sea of Galilee at the start of his ministry, Jesus encountered first Simon and Andrew, and then James and John, and he called out to

them, “Follow me and I will make you fish for people” (Mark 1:17). Later, following his resurrection, Jesus appeared to these same four men, as well as seven others who had accepted his call to be disciples at a mountain in Galilee, and he gave them the command to “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you” (Matt 28:19-20a). This invitation and command are as much meant for Christians today as they were those original disciples over two thousand years ago, and this is the first call to service that elders and deacons need to be aware, their service to God.

Service to God involves following Jesus’ example and continuing the work of Jesus’ ministry to share the Good News of God’s love with the world. It may seem odd to think of this ministry as service, but in truth it is, because those engaged in it are willing to offer their time, their energies and their hearts to make a difference in the spiritual lives of another. The message of God’s saving love is central to Christianity, and, as Christians, it is the solid foundation we build our lives upon and that enables us to endure the difficulties and challenges of life. God’s love makes us whole as we are meant to be; it is the foundation of our forgiveness and restored relationship with God, and it is the source of the joy, peace, courage and hope that makes our lives worth living, regardless of our situation or circumstances. As important as God’s love is in our lives, should we not want to share the Good News of that love with others so they can have it in their lives as well? The efforts to do so are known by many names, evangelism, witnessing, testifying, but regardless of what it is called, it is service to God.

It might sound as if the above discussion should be considered service to others instead of service to God, and while there is certainly service extended to the person receiving the message of God's love, the One who is really served is God. This is because God has created all people to be in relationship with God, and ever since sin disrupted these relationships, God has been seeking for them to be restored. This was the purpose of sending Jesus into the world (John 3:16). Jesus accomplished his mission, and now God has called all Christians to spread the message of God's love so that those who hear can be re-connected in their relationship with God. This includes elders and deacons, who, if they are truly qualified are strong spiritual leaders, will be outstanding messengers for God. And, as beneficial as this saving restoration is for the individual, the evidence of God caring so much about humanity that God sent God's own son to die in order to re-establish relationships with them demonstrates that it is even more meaningful for God. In this way, then, when we accept the invitation to fish for people and obey the command to go, we are truly serving God.

This service to God is important, but it can also seem daunting at times. Lay ministers may feel unprepared or unworthy, or they may be uncomfortable talking about their faith in a culture that has removed religion from many areas of public life. Regardless of the hesitancy, it is vital that elders and deacons learn to share the Gospel message. They can do this by growing in their own spiritual life, through worship, prayer and Bible study. This will enable them to become more comfortable with their own knowledge and faith. It will also be helpful to pray and ask God for help in overcoming the fear of people's reactions, and to be filled with the Holy Spirit so that they might be guided to do and say the right thing when a situation presents itself.

Perhaps the most important aspect of sharing the message of God's love, however, is simply the willingness to live in the light of that love. This is what J.D. O'Donnell is speaking of when he says, "The best witness of any Christian is not the planned program of witness in the church but his casual witness to all with whom he comes into contact."¹ Living in the light of God's love means letting God's love shine in and through our lives so that it touches those we come into contact with. It means living unashamedly in accordance with Jesus' teaching, and not shying away from telling others you are a Christian. Jesus, who called himself the light of the world (John. 8:12), also taught that "You are the light of the world" (Matt 5:14a). He did not offer this as a compliment, but rather as an instruction of how we are to live our lives following his example. He continues his instruction by saying "A city built on a hill cannot be hidden. No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house" (Matt 5:14b-15). God's love is the light in a Christian's life, and that light is not meant to be hidden, but rather to shine forth so that it will both illuminate the way for others walking in darkness in their own lives, and draw them to the source of the light, which is God. Jesus confirms this. "In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven" (Matt 5:16). Every elder and deacon is called to serve God by sharing the Good News of God's love with others with words, through actions, and most importantly, by the life they live, boldly shining their light, the light of God's love in their hearts, for all people to see.

¹ J.D. O'Donnell, *Handbook for Deacons* (Nashville, TN: Randall House Publications, 1973), 93.

Service to the Church

Now before the festival of the Passover, Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart from this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end. The devil had already put it into the heart of Judas son of Simon Iscariot to betray him. And during supper Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going to God, got up from the table, took off his outer robe, and tied a towel around himself. Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was tied around him.

After he had washed their feet, had put on his robe, and had returned to the table, he said to them, "Do you know what I have done to you? You call me Teacher and Lord—and you are right, for that is what I am. So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you. Very truly, I tell you, servant are not greater than their master, nor are messengers greater than the one who sent them. If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them. (John 13:1-5, 12-17)

In addition to their service to God, elders and deacons are also called to serve the church, meaning in this instance, not the institutional church, but rather the Body of Christ, of which they are also members. This service is exercised on two levels, as service to the Body of Christ itself, and as service within the Body of Christ as a member of that Body. Both levels of service are vital to the ministry of elders and deacons, as well as to the healthy functioning of the church.

In order to understand the lay minister's call to serve the church, it is first important to understand the mission of the church, because their service is meant to support that mission. Each church will have its own individual mission, based on the community and culture they are located within, but the church has an overall mission as well. As previously mentioned in the introduction, United Church of Christ theologian, Roger Shinn, contends that "the mission of the church- this is the remarkable fact that must cause the church to always wonder- is the mission of Christ...the church exists to

celebrate and carry on the activity of Christ.”² This mission is accomplished as each church binds together as a community of faith and love, understanding that all Christians have been called by God to follow Jesus’ example, empowered by the Holy Spirit, to continue his work to share the Good News of God’s love, so that humankind can be saved and re-united in relationship with God and one another. If successful, this mission will transform the world and its people, into the Kingdom God intended.

This mission of the church that elders and deacons are called to help fulfill in their service to the church may sound quite similar to what they are called to do in their service to God. This similarity is neither accidental, nor coincidental. In truth, because the church is ultimately God’s church, any service to the church is also service to God. The previous section highlighted the elder’s and deacon’s service to God specifically, so that this understanding would be clear, and that God would be recognized as the One who is really being served. All too often, people understand that they are serving the church, or serving others, but they fail to realize that in doing both they are ultimately serving God. This awareness of serving God, even in the midst of our service to the church, others and ourselves, focuses our attention on God and God’s will, connects us with the strength and resources we need to serve, and reminds us of the One we should really be seeking to please.

As a spiritual leader of the church, called and equipped by God, therefore, a lay minister’s service to the church must involve helping the church fulfill its Divine mission. Unlike their service to God, which parallels and compliments the mission of the church, this service is conducted, not in isolation as an independent agent for God, but rather as a

² Roger Shinn, *Confessing Our Faith, An Interpretation of the Statement of Faith of the United Church of Christ* (Cleveland, OH: United Church Press, 1990), 85.

member of a team. In this regard, it is imperative that elders and deacons recognize not only their position and authority within the church, but also the positions and authority of all other members of the Body as well, including Christ. In Matthew 16:18, Jesus makes his position and authority within the church abundantly clear: “On this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it.” Regardless of whether the “rock” is interpreted as meaning Peter specifically, or Peter’s recognition and profession of Jesus as Christ in general, Jesus’ personal connection and involvement in the church is unmistakable in his statement “I will build *my* church.” The church is Christ’s church, the mission of the church is his mission and he is the head of the church. All other members of the Body, including elders and deacons, are subordinate to and controlled by Christ as the head of the Body.

This understanding of Christ as the head of and ultimate authority within the church should facilitate the functioning and interaction of all other members of the church, because it means that each member has a role in the Body that is determined and directed by Christ, and that all of these determined and directed roles are of equal worth and importance within the Body. There is a temptation for human beings to experience spiritual pride as a result of their calling, and then to exalt themselves over others in the community. This temptation is especially present for elders and deacons who are entrusted with such an important and multi-faceted ministry. It is critical, therefore, that they be aware of this temptation, and resist it by remembering their call as servants, practicing an attitude of humility rather than superiority. It is also helpful for elders and deacons, as well as all leaders within the church to recall the words of Paul:

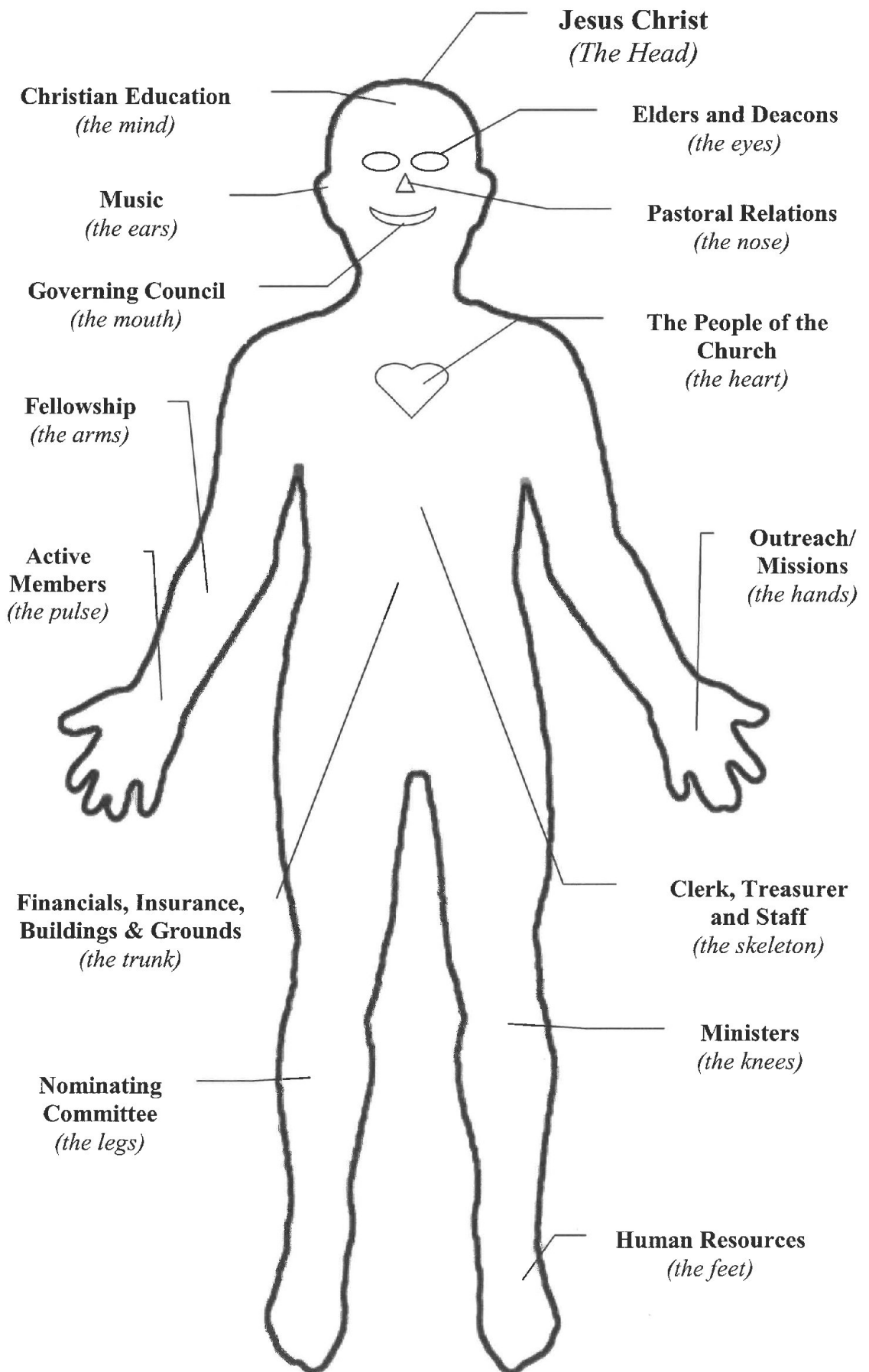
For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in the one

Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and we were all made to drink of one Spirit. Indeed, the body does not consist of one member but of many. If the foot would say, “Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,” that would not make it any less a part of the body. And if the ear would say, “Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body,” that would not make it any less a part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole body were hearing, where would the sense of smell be? But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. If all were a single member, where would the body be? As it is, there are many members, yet one body. The eye cannot say to the hand, “I have no need of you,” nor again the head to the feet, “I have no need of you.” On the contrary, the members of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and those members of the body that we think less honorable we clothe with greater honor, and our less respectable members are treated with greater respect; whereas our more respectable members do not need this. But God has so arranged the body, giving the greater honor to the inferior member, that there may be no dissension within the body, but the members may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it. (1 Cor 12:12-26)

Elders and deacons, as one part of the Body of Christ, serve alongside the other parts of the Body, following Christ to accomplish the mission of the church. Each part has a unique significance in the Body and is crucial to its proper functioning.

Oftentimes today, churches are structured more like a corporation or business, but this is not a biblical model for church structure. Elders and deacons are called into servant leadership positions within the church and can serve the church by educating the other members of the church about Jesus’ personal involvement as the head of the church and what that means in terms of the functioning of the church. The following diagram has been created by this author to better illustrate the church as the “Body” of Christ. The diagram and the explanations that follow can be helpful to elders and deacons as they seek to grow in their own understanding and in educating their churches as well.

Next page: The “Body” of Christ



- **Jesus Christ:** Jesus Christ is the head of the church. It is from him that we receive guidance, instruction and inspiration for all we do, and it is for him and his mission of sharing the Good News of the Gospel message that we exist.
- **The People of the Church:** The People of the church are the heart of the church. They are the life of the church, providing the resources that enable the entire body and all of its members to function and thrive, and acting as the vessels of the compassion and love of God that informs and empowers the work of the church in continuing the mission of Jesus Christ.
- **Governing Council:** The Governing Council is like the mouth of the church. A body is comprised of many members, so it needs a unified voice for communicating with both the body and all that is outside the body. The Governing Council, which is comprised of representatives of the church, often representing various areas and ministries of the church, speaks for the church and its membership in between full church meetings.
- **Christian Education:** Christian Education is like the mind of the church. It is necessary that our faith is built a firm foundation of the teaching of Jesus Christ and the entire Holy Bible, and it is Christian Education that provides the opportunities for such learning and growth.
- **Elders and Deacons:** The Elders and Deacons are like the eyes of the church. Every community needs individuals who are carefully and lovingly watching over the needs of the people, and often this role is primarily filled by the Elders and Deacons as they oversee worship, prayer, pastoral needs not attended to by the pastor and other avenues of caring.

- **Fellowship:** Fellowship is like the arms of the church. Fellowship is vital to the life of a church, so those responsible for Fellowship in the church offer events and opportunities that embrace members and prospective members alike to help them feel both welcome in the church and connected with their fellow members.
- **Music:** Music is like the ears of the church. Humans are called to make a joyful noise to the Lord, and so Music plays an important role in both the worship and overall life of the church as they facilitate the sounds that help bring the experience alive for its members.
- **Outreach/Missions:** Outreach/Missions is like the hands of the church. Reaching out beyond the walls of the church is an important aspect of continuing Christ's mission in the world, so Outreach/ Missions identifies the needs of our neighbors, both near and far, and provides the members with avenues to address those needs in love.
- **Financials, Insurance, Buildings & Grounds:** Those who take care of the Financials, Insurance, Buildings & Grounds and other such logistics of the church are like the trunk of the church. Like the trunk, which is the core of the body, providing strength and support to the rest of the members and protecting the vital organs that allow the body to function, these members oversee the core aspects of the church that support its functioning, including the budget, insurance, investments, rentals and buildings and grounds.
- **Active Members:** The Active Members of a church are like the pulse of the church. Just as the pulse is an indicator of the condition of the heart, Active Members provide indicators of the condition of the heart of the church, which is the

people, by watching, listening and being available for discussion about the church, how it functions and its mission.

- **Human Resources:** Human Resources is like the feet of the church. Human Resources, whether as a separate committee, or as a function of the Governing Council, is charged with the hiring, contracts and oversight of the ministers and staff, so they complement the work of the Nominating Committee by providing the body with a footing for the mobility needed by the church to continue moving forward in its mission.
- **Nominating Committee:** The Nominating Committee is like the legs of the church. The legs provide the body with mobility, and in the same manner, the Nominating Committee provides the church with mobility by doing the work investigating, recruiting and securing a variety of member volunteers to bring their talents and abilities to fill the positions within the areas and ministries of the church so they can keep the church moving forward in accomplishing its mission.
- **Pastoral Relations:** Pastoral Relations is like the nose of the church. There are always plenty of thoughts and opinions in any church at any given time, so Pastoral Relations “sniffs out” these thoughts and opinions and brings them to the ministers, and together they acknowledge and address them.
- **Clerk, Treasurer and Staff:** The clerk, treasurer and staff are like the skeleton of the church. Like a skeleton, the primary function of the clerk, treasurer and staff is to support the Body of the Church, to provide assistance to the areas and ministries of the church and members as needed, and to undergird them as they fulfill their role in the mission of the church.

- **Ministers:** The ministers are like the knees of the church. They are integrated among the legs of the Nominating Committee and the many volunteer leaders they put in place, and Human Resources and the staff they oversee, but more importantly, the ministers are responsible for providing a spiritual foundation for the church and its members through teaching, preaching, counseling and prayer.

Once an understanding of the church as the Body of Christ is communicated, elders and deacons can use Paul's words to create a new foundation for church structure, incorporating the biblical reality that all members of the Body are important, because all members have been called and equipped by God for their particular service within and on behalf of the church. In addition, the more individual churches that accept the biblical idea of the Christian Church as the Body of Christ, and then translate that acceptance, not only into their own organizational structure, but also into their relationships and interactions with other churches, enabling each church to function as an equal member of the Body, without envy or judgment, the more Jesus' words will be fulfilled, and the more there will be nothing in the world, or beyond the world that will prevail against the church. The call of elders and deacons to serve the church involves doing their part to bring about this transformation and fulfill Jesus' words.

Ultimately, the most fundamental way for elders and deacons to transform today's church into the biblical model of the Body of Christ is through their own example. The way lay ministers interact with other members and leaders of the church will go a long way toward influencing others. Remember, elders and deacons are to be chosen, in part, because they are members who have lives and Christian characters worthy of imitation; so it stands to reason that the actions of an elder or deacon, once confirmed as such, will

carry even more weight as an example within the church. This is quite a responsibility, but one that can be discharged if they are seeking in all ways to follow Jesus' example with a humble heart.

In addition to their interaction with other lay leaders and members of the church, elders and deacons also need to partner closely with pastors. Because of their work in the spiritual and pastoral ministries of the church, the relationship between lay ministers and pastors is like a marriage that can make or break a church. It is important, therefore, that both lay ministers and pastors put forth the effort to understand one another, support, encourage and pray for each other and be willing to grow together. As one pastor, Howard Foshee, believes, "Like the hand that needs the fingers to be the hand, we as pastors and deacons need one another to be a team."³ There are many expressions of this need that pastors have for elders and deacons, just as there are needs that elders and deacons have of pastors, but one in particular can be found in the elders' and deacons' ability, as lay members of the church, and that is to interact with other lay members in a way that the pastor cannot.

As important as it is for pastors to develop good relationships with their congregations, those relationships will always exist between an ordained clergy person and members of the laity, and while the pastor is very much included in the Body of Christ as an equal member with all others, there remains a perception that the pastor exists on a different level. This perceived discrepancy could be a threat to the church because of the communication and interactive gaps it can produce, except that the ministry of elders and deacons, as lay members of the church, bridges these gaps. As laymen and women, elders and deacons can interact with and within the congregation,

³ Howard B. Foshee, *Now That You're a Deacon* (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1975), 24.

enabling them to discern problem and to have the pulse of the congregation in ways the pastor cannot. This, too, is part of the service of a lay minister to the church; to be sensitively tuned in to the subtle signals within the church so they can pick up on where problems may be brewing, where unexpressed spiritual issues exist and where potential breaks in church fellowship may be starting. Elders and deacons serve the church by being concerned and attentive to the needs of the church, and then by partnering with the pastor to address those needs.

The ways in which elders and deacons partner with the pastor to care for the needs of the church are as diverse as the needs themselves. Caring for the individual concerns of others will be covered in the following section. There is also a discussion of leadership and conflict management skills, both of which are extremely helpful in addressing needs within a church, in chapter 5. The needs of the congregation are also cared for during the weekly worship service and all special services. It is, therefore, part of a lay minister's service to the church to partner with the pastor in worship. Exactly how an elder or deacon will function in this ministry will be determined by the practices of the individual church, but there are some general practices that are discussed in greater detail in chapter 4.

The servant leadership of elders and deacons is vital to any church. Their service to the church, both through their actions and their example is an important determiner of whether or not the church is able to fulfill its God-given mission. The ministry of elders and deacons has many facets, and their service to the church creates the foundation for much of the other work they are called to do. If the church is healthy and functioning as the Body of Christ Jesus intended it to be, then God's people will have a spiritual home

where they can be fed, nurtured and cared for, as well as where they can grow, develop and become ready to be called to serve also. The service of elders and deacons truly touches the future of the church, not only the local church, but the Christian Church as a whole, and contributes toward Jesus' mission being fulfilled.

Service to Others

When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Feed my lambs." A second time he said to him, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Tend my sheep." He said to him the third time, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" Peter felt hurt because he said to him the third time, "Do you love me?" And he said to him, "Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Feed my sheep." (John 21:15-17)

Even as elders and deacons serve the Body of Christ, the church in the corporate sense, they are also called to serve the needs of its members in the individual sense. This is a shift from the care of the community to the care of the person, but it is just as important to the ministry of an elder or deacon. This area of service connects today's elders with the men chosen by Moses in Exodus 18:19-26, who were called to serve the people with their issues, and today's deacons with the seven men chosen in Acts 6:1-7, who were called to serve the needs of the widows in their community. Serving others by caring for their needs is part of the heritage of what it means to be an elder and a deacon, and, as leaders within the church, elders and deacons are called, not only to this caring service themselves, but also to model it for other Christians as well.

Caring for the needs of others was a cornerstone of Jesus' teaching and example, and is an important part of the ministry of the church. As contemporary theologian Donald Messer points out, "no single image of Christian ministry was normative in

scripture or tradition beyond the understanding of serving God by meeting human need.”⁴

Throughout the history of the Christian Church, caring for humanity and meeting human need has been the essence of Christian ministry. This ministry is the responsibility of all Christians, but it is generally the pastors, elders and deacons who are expected to lead the way. There are some who believe this caring service, often referred to as pastoral care is, by definition, the sole work of the pastor. It is important to understand, however, that the word “pastor” simply means “shepherd,” and that, just as a shepherd cares for the sheep, those who have been called to care for others, including both pastors and lay ministers, are called to render pastoral care to those in need. In fact, because the ratio of pastors to members is generally fairly high, without the service of elders and deacons in pastoral care, there will be pastoral concerns that go unmet, simply because pastors can only do so much. As discussed earlier in this manual, Jesus multiplied his caring efforts by calling and training his twelve disciples. Today’s churches would benefit greatly from adopting that same practice with their pastors and lay ministers.

Jesus is the greatest example for all Christians seeking to care for people’s needs, so in order to faithfully serve others, elders and deacons need to understand how Jesus cared. There are many biblical examples that can be cited here, including the parable of the Good Samaritan, which is a lesson all elders and deacons should commit within their hearts, but there is a more fundamental aspect of Jesus’ caring to consider first. In the broadest sense, all of Jesus’ teaching and examples of caring service were the result of his love for others. This love was the result of seeing people as God sees them, as creations of the Divine, each created in the image of God and possessing infinite worth as a result

⁴ Donald E. Messer, *Contemporary Images of Christian Ministry* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1989), 31.

of that image. The challenge for human beings is that we see with our own eyes, rather than with God's eyes as Jesus did. This may be considered just part of being *human*, but in fact, Jesus calls us to be more. The Holy Spirit is God's Spirit and connects us to God, so the Holy Spirit can enable us to see others with God's eyes, just as Jesus did. There is one catch, however. We have to be willing to see others as God does. That sounds simple enough, but our human prejudices and judgments are deeply engrained and can be difficult to overcome; difficult, but not impossible. Through prayer and commitment, these prejudices and judgments can be surrendered to God and transformed by the Holy Spirit into acceptance and love. This will enable elders and deacons to truly follow Jesus' example, and reach out to all who were in need, regardless of race (Matt 8:5-13), social stature (Luke 8:26-33), religious belief (John 4:7-26), or gender (Mark 7:25-30).

When elders and deacons are able to see others as Jesus did, in love and with the eyes of God, they will be well-positioned to offer caring service. This service may not always be easy or convenient, but it is a great ministry, because in caring for the needs of others, elders and deacons are ministering to those closest to God's heart. The Bible is very clear that God not only cares deeply for all of God's human creation, but that God has a special place in God's heart for those who are hurting and in distress. One example can be found in God's conversation with Moses from the burning bush when God said, "I have observed the misery of my people who are in Egypt; I have heard their cry on account of their taskmasters. Indeed, I know their sufferings, and I have come down to deliver them from the Egyptians" (Exod 3:7-8a). God cares about all of humanity, and as Christians, deacons are called to both care, and act on that caring as well. As Alexander Strauch so aptly points out, "We must not forget that the real treasures of the church are

its people, not its pews and buildings.”⁵ The people are the essence of the church, so the lay minister’s call to serve their needs is vital to the heart of the church.

Caring for others requires an individual who is a caring person. This might seem obvious, but its importance should not be overlooked, because while there are some people who are naturally caring, it is also possible to develop an attitude of caring, and it is additionally necessary that all persons continue to nurture their ability to care. The constant in both development and nurturing is that the process is, again, fueled by love. Leroy Howe explains in his book, *A Pastor in Every Pew*, that “If love is the commitment and actions that intends the well being of all God’s creatures, then care is a relationship and an attitude in which God’s love in Christ becomes embodied to everyone.”⁶ Love inspires us to want to care for others, and it guides our hearts toward becoming a caring individual. Some of the qualities that love enables in a caring person include being concerned for the well being of others, being willing to accept the leadership responsibilities for shepherding people away from the bad and toward good, having an attitude of supportiveness for the worth and integrity of the individual just as they are, and offering unwavering encouragement in all situations and circumstances. These qualities of a caring person are also indispensable characteristics of an elder or deacon.

Being a caring person is important in the lay minister’s service to others, but it is not all there is. It is also necessary to establish caring relationships with the members of the congregation. Building relationships with people in advance of a crisis creates the foundation for a caring relationship when a crisis does occur. These relationships take

⁵ Alexander Strauch, *New Testament Deacon: The Church’s Ministers of Mercy* (Littleton, CO: Lewis and Roth Publishers, 1992), 157.

⁶ Leroy Howe, *A Pastor in Every Pew: Equipping Laity for Pastoral Care* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 2000), 13.

time and intentional effort to create, but that investment will pay great dividends in a crisis. Caring relationships provide an important connection between the lay minister and the individual in need, and enable the development of trust, which is crucial in offering care. If the elder or deacon has not earned the trust of the person in need, it will be very difficult for that person to be truly open to receiving care. The work of building caring relationships is an important part of the ministry of elders and deacons, because they affirm individuals as persons of sacred worth, who are loved by God and by others.

Establishing these caring relationships requires empathy, genuineness, respect, hopefulness and the affirmation of a person's strengths. Empathy is more than just a feeling; it is a sincere interest in both the person and their situation, coupled with the desire to understand both the situation and the person's feelings about it. Genuineness simply means being one's self, humbly, without airs or pretense and with a truly grateful heart for who that person is and what God has given them. Respect involves really honoring the dignity and worth of another person as a child of God, without any prejudices, judgments, or pre-conceived ideas. Hopefulness is fundamental to caring relationships, and it is important to understand that there is a difference between hoping and wishing. Hope is realistic, and is based in faith in God. It is an attitude that can be communicated and shared with another person. And, finally, affirming the person's strengths is important because, in truth, most people have a greater capacity to help themselves than even the most caring individual does. That capacity needs to be harnessed, however, and this can be done by helping the person believe in themselves, as well as in God's ability to help them. It is true, however, that there are some individuals, including children and those who are elderly and seriously ill, who cannot help themselves, and

who do need the protection and help of a caring person. There are also others who will refuse to help themselves, and, unfortunately, there is not a lot that can be done for them, except to continue to offer patience, compassion and prayer.

In addition to developing these important characteristics, building a caring relationship involves the willingness to truly be present with another person and a desire to understand them. Being present can be a challenge in our technology-driven world, where speed and efficiency have seemingly taken precedence over personal connection and honest engagement. For elders and deacons to fulfill their service to others, however, this is a challenge that must be overcome. A willingness to devote their time and attention to others within the church will enable elders and deacons to build caring relationships and will facilitate their caring ministry when it is needed. This same time and attention is also needed in order to understand people. Understanding others requires energy and commitment, but once it is achieved, it significantly impacts a lay minister's influence, as well as their ability to communicate with the person in need. Understanding is critical to caring service because it cuts through the fear, self-centeredness and misunderstandings that separate people; it then binds them together, enabling care to be offered.

In serving others, elders and deacons are called to a ministry of love, and this ministry should not be looked upon lightly, because it follows the example of Jesus' ministry. Caring service to others also attracts people to the church. There are a lot of hurting and wounded people in the world today, people who are desperate for someone to care about them, to recognize their true worth as children of God and to share God's love without condition or judgment. This is the ministry of the church, and it is a ministry that

elders, deacons and pastors are called to take the lead in. This may seem like a daunting task, but it should not be regarded as such, for as Alexander Strauch points out, lay ministers “have the honor of modeling, for the local church and a lost world, God’s compassion, kindness, mercy, and love.”⁷ No matter what the cost, elders and deacons should remember that their service of caring for others is an important ministry, not only because it demonstrates God’s love to those in need, but also because, in demonstrating God’s love, deacons can draw others to the church and into lasting fellowship with God.

Service to One’s Self

Then he said to them all, “If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will save it. What does it profit them if they gain the whole world, but lose or forfeit themselves? Those who are ashamed of me and of my words, of them the Son of Man will be ashamed when he comes in his glory and the glory of the Father and of the holy angels. But truly I tell you, there are some standing here who will not taste death before they see the kingdom of God.” (Luke 9:23-27)

As important as the service to God, the church and others is, the ministry of an elder or deacon is not fully complete until they are also serving their own self. This might sound a bit at odds with the notion of servanthood, but in reality serving one’s own self enables servanthood. The idea of service to one’s self, however, is not the same as being self-serving, which clearly has a selfish connotation. Instead, serving one’s self means taking care of the person whom God has called to a ministry of service, which, if you have been called as an elder or deacon, is you. Caring for one’s own self involves developing a personal spiritual life through intentional discipleship, as well as taking steps to support personal needs, nurture the self and prevent burn-out.

⁷ Strauch, *The New Testament Deacon*, 157.

Discipleship involves following Jesus, and seeking to grow in one's spiritual life by studying his teaching, learning to live according to that teaching and trusting God for guidance and direction as Jesus did. Discipleship can also be thought of as the call of every Christian to live into the image of God they have been created in by following Jesus' example of living in God's image and reflecting God's love into the world.

Discipleship has many benefits for the Christian, but it requires commitment and sacrifice. In order to live in the image of God, an individual needs to first deny their own perceived image, and be willing to follow, not their own intentions and desires, but Jesus' example of focusing on God's will and God's love.

Discipleship is important, not just for the personal spiritual growth of the individual, but also because it is necessary preparation for ministry. This is because only when a person is willing to deny themselves and submit to God's will, rather than insisting on their own desires will they truly be open and ready for God to work in them and through them for the fulfillment of their ministry. The goal of discipleship, then, is to learn from Jesus as we are following Jesus, and to be transformed by his teaching and example, so that we can become as much like him as possible. When Christians, elders and deacons included, are willing to pursue this path they will not only grow and be strengthened in their own spiritual lives, but they will also be successful in continuing Jesus' ministry to serve others and share the Good News of God's love as well.

Discipleship is not for one's own self alone; it is also the foundation for service to God, the church and others, because it is through the growth of discipleship that the disciple is

made ready to be used by God in ministry. As Archbishop Desmond Tutu explains, “you meet God as a burning bush in order to be sent to Pharaoh to redeem captives.”⁸

Discipleship supports ministry by developing an individual’s spiritual life, but it is also important that the ministry of elders and deacons is supported through self-care. Self-care involves a recognition that the one who offers support and caring also needs to be supported and cared for. Often, people who are very good at caring for others are not good at caring for themselves. There is an unfortunate misconception in ministry that it is good to give all we have until there is nothing left. The truth is, however, that if we give all we have, we will have nothing left to give. Our ministry will be forced to end and those who might have been helped through our ministry will be left without their needs being met. Balance is critical in ministry. It is true that elders and deacons have been called and equipped for ministries of service, and that they have a responsibility before God to answer their call and engage in service to God, the church and others, but, while there are sacrifices involved in ministry, God does not call elders or deacons, or any other Christian to destroy themselves in the work of ministry. Burning out serves no purpose for God; it creates harm to all spiritual leaders and reduces, or removes entirely their usefulness in ministry. Self-care is as much a responsibility in ministry as answering God’s call in the first place.

Self-care is about taking care of the self, so each person will need to make a personal assessment of their needs and then implement ways of ensuring those needs are met. Some generalities in self-care include setting healthy boundaries, which includes defining what constitutes an “emergency situation,” and determining how offering caring

⁸ Michael Battle, *Reconciliation: The Ubuntu Theology of Desmond Tutu* (Cleveland, OH: Pilgrim Press, 1997), 176.

service will be balanced with life's other priorities, such as work, family, friends and rest. Self-care also involves making referrals to the pastor or other elders or deacons when necessary, being fully trained and refreshing that training, having someone who can listen after a tough caring situation, being willing to receive encouragement and care from others, getting sufficient rest and nutrition, caring for one's own mental, emotional, social and physical needs, as well as the spiritual ones, having a support system to turn to when needed, and knowing when to say "no." Self-care may seem selfish, but in reality, it is similar to caring for a car by changing the oil, rotating the tires, replacing old filters and worn-out belts and hoses. The car will continue to run without these measures in the short term, but in the long term, it will stop running because it has not been properly cared for. In caring for the self, an individual is really caring for the ministry that person is called to. It is not selfish, it is necessary.

Self-care and discipleship are both important components to the elder's and deacon's call to serve the self, and serving one's own self is vital to their continued ability to serve God, the church and others. Both should be given careful consideration in the life of elders and deacons, because both of these areas of service address the needs of the one meeting the needs of others, namely the elder or deacon. If lay ministers are not intentional about developing their spiritual life and taking care of themselves, they will eventually burn out, their gifts will go to waste and their ministries will be abandoned. This is not the purpose of any call or ministry. By intentionally engaging in discipleship and self-care, however, elders and deacons will not only grow personally, but they will also produce much fruit in the ministries God has called them to. The needs of God's

people and the church will be served and cared for, and God's Kingdom will be increased because God's purpose will have been fulfilled.

The Bible makes it clear that the ministry of service that Christians, and particularly elders and deacons, are called to by God is a multi-faceted ministry. The four primary areas, service to God, the church, others and one's self, combine to form the foundation of the church's mission of continuing Jesus' work in the world. An elder's or deacon's ability to fulfill their call to serve God through sharing the Good News of the Gospel message, to serve the church through their leadership and contribution as part of the Body of Christ, to serve others through their caring and compassionate responses in times of need, and to serve themselves through self-care and a focus on spiritual growth and development is vital to the Christian Church. The service of these lay leaders, coupled with the faithful contributions of other Christians, will enable the Church to heal old wounds, fill in gaps and facilitate the building up of God's Kingdom, one heart at a time. Given this level of importance, therefore, it is crucial that there be a clear understanding about some of the organizing and operational principles of elders and deacons. Each church will have their own individual practices and procedures, but the following chapter will present some basic informational groundwork in the areas of how individuals become elders and deacons, the basics about meetings, insights into worship and a general overview of ministry. Hopefully, this information will offer churches a place to begin.

CHAPTER 4. SPECIFICS FOR ELDERS AND DEACONS

The specifics for elders and deacons will vary from church to church, and possibly will also be modified over time as the church grows and times change. Despite these variations and alterations, however, this portion of the manual is important because it creates clear and unified communication about the procedures and expectations of the elders and deacons. Without this, elders and deacons will begin to operate individually and the strength of the ministry, which is derived from the unity of the elders and deacons as a group will be compromised and the church will suffer.

Becoming

It is important to remember that the selection of elders and deacons should be based on an individual's qualifications for the role, not on length of years in the church, amount of money pledged, or level of status in the community. The position is one of service and humility, not authority and popularity. It is an honor to be called to serve as an elder or deacon. The selection process for elders and deacons, therefore, should be guided by prayerful discernment of God's Will. The biblical qualifications listed in 1 Timothy 3:1-13 and Titus 1:5-9 need to be strongly considered, and the candidate's character and spiritual maturity examined to ensure that the person will be able to be the servant leader and faithful example for the church that elders and deacons are called to be. How this process is specifically carried out will differ from church to church. The important aspect of the process is that it happens, and that it happens in a biblically and spiritually sound manner that honors God.

In addition to the biblical qualifications, a candidate for elder or deacon should be an active church member who has already demonstrated the potential for leadership. This may mean that the person is already a leader, or that they have a reputation of leading others through perception and by their example. It is also important that the person has a sense of responsibility toward others, and an inclination to minister to those in need. They need to understand and be committed to the responsibilities of lay ministry, and accept that more is expected of an elder or deacon than of an ordinary member. They should be both secure and growing in their faith, a positive witness for Christ and the church, who is prayerfully led and held in high regard by the congregation. A good candidate will be a humble and loving individual who demonstrates a potential for spiritual service, a dedication to the service of the church, a commitment to be engaged and involved, a reputation for confidentiality, and a willingness to be an example of Christian living and values for others.

Once a potential candidate has been identified, and it has been determined that they are well-qualified and called by God for the position, the selection/nominating committee should contact the individual to ensure that they are willing to serve as an elder or deacon. When the individual has affirmed their willingness to serve, the selection/nominating committee can then submit the individual's name to the governing church body for approval. Once the candidate has been approved by the governing body, their name can be submitted to the congregation for final approval. The approved candidate will then begin their service. The specific procedures of this process will be determined by each individual congregation.

Meetings

It is important for elders and deacons to gather together for information sharing, prayer, support, and training. It is useful when meetings are held monthly, on a regular day and time. The length of the meeting will be determined by the content, but it is helpful to remember that, in most cases, elders and deacons are volunteers with families and jobs, so planning meetings that are well-organized and relevant will communicate respect for their time. It is also helpful to have a consistent procedure for running the meetings and maintaining order. The latest edition of Robert's Rules of Order can provide this, and is recommended. Many churches also require a quorum to be present in order for any official business to be conducted. The definition of this quorum should be outlined in the church's constitution or by-laws.

When meetings are held, all elders and deacons should make an effort to attend because these gatherings are important opportunities for the group to come together for help and encouragement, as well as for ongoing training and the sharing of information about current ministries and the church in general. A chair can be designated to be responsible for setting the agenda for the meeting if desired, but there are some general elements that will provide consistent and efficient meetings. They should open and close in prayer and include a brief devotion, prayer requests and concerns from the congregation. Any concerns, assignments or projects from previous meetings can also be reviewed and discussed. It is good for there to be a time for the pastor to share about matters of special interest and concern for the elders and deacons, and information can also be communicated from the pastors, staff, governing body of the church, and other leaders, committees or ministry teams within the church. It is good to give elders and

deacons an opportunity to give reports regarding their various ministry efforts, and to discuss what their impressions, challenges and needs are in these ministries. This gives all of the elders and deacons the chance to not only be on the same page, but also to support one another as they serve. If there are new ministry needs, these can also be discussed and distributed at this time as well. It is also very helpful to have a time of training built in to every meeting. Training is important because it ensures that the elders and deacons remain sharp and continue their growth and development. This may seem like a lot to accomplish in a reasonable amount of time, but in most cases, once a procedure is established and known, the meetings will progress along in an informative and efficient manner.

Worship

The specific role that an elder or deacon plays in worship will be determined by each individual church. In many churches, elders and deacons are engaged in a supportive role that is somewhat reminiscent of the apostles selecting the seven men in Acts 6:1-7. The apostles recognized their need to focus on prayer and the teaching of God's Word, so they selected lay members to assist in other matters. These same responsibilities are held today by pastors, so it is just as important now as it was then that the pastor be able to focus on prayer and the teaching/ preaching of God's Word. Elders and deacons, then, can serve the church in worship by doing whatever is necessary to ensure that pastors can focus on their responsibilities.

This can involve arriving early to ensure that everything is ready for worship, that Bibles and hymnals are in place, that the sound system is functioning, that there is water

person, or they can be immersed fully. Regardless of the method of baptism, however, the act of baptism represents dying to the old life and rising into a new life in Christ.

The individual is responsible for making a profession of their faith prior to their baptism, marking their desire to be baptized. This is not possible, however, with infants and young children, as they are either unable or not ready to make such a profession for themselves. In these instances, many mainline Protestant churches allow the parents to make their own profession, and then to commit to raising the infant or child in the church and according to Christian faith and teachings. Churches that practice infant and child baptism usually offer some form of program and service in which the child, once grown to young adult age, confirms their baptismal vows. In these confirmation services, the youth is not re-baptized, but rather makes their own profession of faith and verifies their desire to be a part of the Christian Church and a follower of Christ.

Communion, also called the Lord's Supper or the Eucharist, is an opportunity for Christians to regularly affirm their faith and remind themselves of Jesus' love and sacrifice. This sacrament, which consists of sharing bread and either wine or grape juice, was instituted by Jesus on the final night of his earthly life (Luke 22:19-20). He instructed his followers to remember him through the breaking of the bread, which represents his body broken in death, and sharing the wine, which represents his blood shed on the cross. In remembering his sacrifice, Christians are also invited to recall their own sins and the forgiveness and redemption Jesus made possible, as well as to commit themselves to living fully in relationship with God as Jesus did. Communion can be practiced by serving individual cups and wafers or cubes of bread, either as people remain in their pews or when they come up front to the altar or another central location.

It can also be practiced by intinction, a practice in which a piece of bread or wafer is dipped into a common cup, usually at the altar or central location, or by simply consuming the bread and drinking from a common cup, as Jesus would have done with his disciples. As with the sacrament of baptism, the manner in which it is practiced is less important than the spiritual commitment made to God while practicing. Communion is a celebration of God's love and Jesus' willingness to pay the price for our eternal life. It is a critical part of the Christian life, and elders and deacons can play a valuable role in the church by sharing in its practice and encouraging others to do the same.

The role of elders and deacons in the sacraments of baptism and communion, as well as for other services of the church will vary from church to church. Regardless of the specific function, however, it is important to understand that the lay minister's role in worship is not about being up front or "on stage." Rather, it is about their service to the church in ensuring that the people feel welcomed and comfortable, and that the worship service is as free from troubles and disruptions as possible, because only under these conditions will worship be a meaningful and impactful experience for the congregation. Worship is a central function of the church, and, according to Howard Foshee, servant leaders of the church "have a strategic role in building the true spirit of worship in their church."¹ This spirit of worship is created, not only by preparing the church and themselves for worship, but also by building a friendly atmosphere in the church. Being present before the service to greet members of the congregation and to welcome and answer questions of any guests and newcomers makes a big difference in how people perceive the church. It is also helpful for elders and deacons to be present following the service to greet individuals as they are leaving, and to gather pertinent information, such

¹ Howard B. Foshee, *Now That You're a Deacon* (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1975), 87.

as the names and addresses of guests and newcomers so the pastor can send a note during the week.

In order to be most helpful in their support of the pastor, elders and deacons should understand the liturgical seasons of the church year and the appropriate colors associated with those seasons. Unlike the calendar year, the church year begins with the start of Advent, the four weeks preceding Christmas and the celebration of the birth of Jesus. The traditional color for Advent, for altar cloths, pulpit paraments and stoles, is purple, although some churches have opted to use blue so as distinguish Advent from Lent, which also uses the color purple. Regardless of whether purple or blue is used, the color remains until the Christmas service, and then, in recognition of the celebratory aspect, the liturgical color changes to white. The use of white continues for the first Sunday after Christmas, Epiphany and the celebration of the baptism of Christ, which is the first Sunday after Epiphany. Beginning on the second Sunday after Epiphany, the liturgical color switches to green and remains as such until the last Sunday after Epiphany, which is also called Transfiguration Sunday. On this Sunday, the liturgical color is white. The following Sunday begins the season of Lent, the forty days before Easter, when the liturgical color changes to purple. There are six Sundays in Lent, with the sixth being celebrated as either Palm Sunday or Passion Sunday. If Palm Sunday is observed, the color remains purple, while for Passion Sunday the color changes to red. During Holy Week, there are a few changes that are traditional. On Maundy Thursday, the liturgical color is white, but on Good Friday and Holy Saturday, the color changes to black, or the altar and pulpit are stripped bare. On Easter, the liturgical color of celebration, white, is used, and continues to be used in the season of Easter, which ends

fifty days later on Pentecost Sunday. The liturgical color for Pentecost is red, in recognition of the Holy Spirit. After Pentecost, the liturgical color returns to green. Other Church holy days that may be observed include Trinity Sunday, for which white is used, Reformation Sunday, for which red is used and other observations in the life of the church, such as Confirmation services (red) and Communion and Baptism services (white). Each church will have their own practices for worship throughout the church year and for their use of liturgical colors, and the elders and deacons would be wise to familiarize themselves with these specific practices and procedures. There are online resources to help identify the holy days and their liturgical colors, and a couple of these are included in the Resources section of this manual. There is also a table below which may prove useful.

Table 1. Liturgical Holidays and Colors

Liturgical Holiday	Liturgical Color
Advent	purple/ blue
Christmas	white
Epiphany	white
2 nd Sunday after Epiphany to Transfiguration Sunday	green
Transfiguration Sunday	white
Lent	purple
Passion Sunday	red

Maundy Thursday	white
Good Friday & Holy Saturday	black/ none
Easter & Easter Season	white
Pentecost	red
after Pentecost and before Advent	green
Trinity Sunday	white
Reformation Sunday	red
Confirmation Service	red
Communion & Baptism Service	white

Perhaps the most important aspect of an elder's or deacon's service in worship, however, is simply their attendance. Whether they are responsible for assisting in the service that day or not, elders and deacons perform a vital role in the church by modeling faithful church attendance. Remember that elders and deacons are spiritual leaders in the church, and as such they are examples for others to follow. If church members rarely see them present in worship, sharing fellowship, praising God, praying for the concerns of others, hearing God's Word and seeking to grow from the lessons shared, then there is far less incentive for those members to take the church seriously in their own spiritual lives.

Ministry

In general, the ministry of elders and deacons will involve serving God, the church, other people and their own selves, as discussed earlier. Some of these ministries will result from needs that arise in the church, and others will involve ongoing service to the members. The specifics of an elder's or deacon's service and the ministries that will emerge to facilitate it will be unique to each church and the needs and organizational structure of that church. Regardless of the specifics, however, it is always important to remember that all ministries have their foundation in God. It is God who calls and God who equips, so all ministry service is ultimately done for the glory of God and the building up of God's Kingdom.

At many churches, elders and deacons respond to ministry needs as requested by the pastor, such as hospital visits, meetings with members in crisis and support of individuals with ongoing challenges. These calls can go to any elder or deacon, although a system can be established where the lay ministers take turns being "on call" for such needs. The specific duties for the "on call" elder or deacon might include being the point person for any memorial service or other non-Sunday service scheduled in that month, checking in with the pastor to stay on top of the needs of the congregation, and responding to any of those needs as appropriate and requested by the pastor.

Elders and deacons may also have other ongoing ministry teams and events that they are responsible for. These may include coordination of services, new members' orientations, baptisms, shepherding efforts, ushering, home visits, outreach, and caring for the needs of the pastor. Specific ministries of the elders and deacons will be determined by each individual church, based on their needs and traditions, and will likely

evolve and change over time as the church grows and transforms. These adjustments are part of being a healthy church that is continually assessing the needs of the people and their response to those needs, and the elders and deacons serve the church by initiating these assessments and adaptations. A church that is not doing this will soon find itself out of touch and ineffective in continuing the mission of Christ and serving the world in the love of God.

The ministry of service that elders and deacons are called to is too important to allow its organizational and operational basics to be left to chance. It is important for churches to have some general information that provides a unified starting point, even though each will have specific procedures and practices that fit their role and the needs of their community in their precise context. This information can create common ground and, hopefully, communication between individual churches as they work together to fulfill Jesus' mission. Having a shared understanding of fundamental processes, such as how members become elders and deacons, the importance of group meetings, the particulars of worship, including knowledge of the sacraments of baptism and communion, and a general overview of lay ministry can help churches become a collective force in a lost and hurting world. The next step is to move beyond the generalities of service ministry to its specifics, so the next chapter details particular aspects of the ministry that elders and deacons are called to. It presents particular key definitions, as well as information on a number of issues that lay ministers may be confronted with, but may not feel adequately competent in. It also offers some practical advice and wisdom for dealing with these issues when they arise.

CHAPTER 5. A GUIDE FOR MINISTERING TO OTHERS

It may have become apparent by now that the ministry of elders and deacons is complex and extensive. It should not be, however, without sufficient tools to aid these lay ministers in their service to God, the church, others and themselves. The following guide is intended to be such a tool. These topics are ones that elders and deacons will likely encounter in their ministry and ones that many people are unfamiliar with. The discussions are not exhaustive by any means, but rather are offered as a foundational basis and starting point for further exploration and growth. Some of the topics and material presented are similar to the information and training offered by the Stephen Ministries in St. Louis, MO, and this program of instruction may provide additional resources for churches. The Suggested Reading List in Appendix 4 at the end of this manual provides further resources as well.

Understanding Crisis

Ministries of caring usually begin with some type of crisis. It is important, therefore, that elders and deacons understand what crisis is. This understanding is not the same as managing a crisis situation, although that, too, may be asked of a lay minister, but an awareness of what creates and constitutes a crisis can be extremely helpful as an elder or deacon seeks to minister to a person in crisis. The insight provides them with a foundation to begin their work, as well as a guide for what resources might be most effective in their ministry efforts.

A crisis can mean different things to different people. What one person would consider a crisis, another person may simply regard as a challenge. There are, of course,

some universally accepted crises, including death, natural disaster and major losses, but even in these examples, how a person perceives the situation will largely determine whether or not they consider it to be a crisis. Factors such as past experiences, support systems and personal coping mechanisms contribute to an individual's perceptions in any given circumstance. It is important, then, to establish an objective definition of a crisis. In his book, *Lay Shepherding*, Rudolph Grantham offers the following definition, "A crisis is a situation or event in someone's life which is perceived as threatening to vital need and possibly catastrophic, but also harboring the potential for growth."¹ Generally speaking, a crisis is defined according to a person's perception, but this defining perception is not of the situation itself, but rather of the threat to a "vital need" in a person's life. For example, the loss of a job creates a challenging situation for most people, but it can be a crisis for a father of four, whose wife is battling cancer, and who would likely feel his need to provide and care for his family greatly threatened. In dealing with any crisis, therefore, it is important to take the time to determine what need is feeling threatened by the situation, because helping the person to lessen or eliminate that threat will lessen or eliminate the crisis.

It is also important to understand that, when a crisis occurs, it tends to create such a storm in the person's life that other problems, not necessarily threatening alone, are drawn into the crisis, compounding it and heightening the sense of threat. Additionally, a single problem can become a web of inter-related problems, and be transformed into a crisis for the individual. For example, a health issue can affect financial security, the family dynamic and the person's sense of self-worth. A crisis can bring up old,

¹ Rudolph E. Grantham, *Lay Shepherding: A Guide for Visiting the Sick, the Aged, the Troubled, and the Bereaved* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1980), 23.

unresolved issues and fears, causing emotions, both positive and negative, to build up within the person as the crisis continues around them. In addition, family relationships and dynamics can either help or hinder the crisis-resolution process and sometimes even do both simultaneously. Elders and deacons need to be aware of all of these compounding factors, so that they can support the person in addressing the whole of a crisis, rather than simply trying to fix the most obvious aspects of it. This kind of surface fixing is like putting a band aid on a gunshot victim; it is not really helpful and, all too often, it leads to a greater crisis later.

In a crisis, a person uses the coping and problem-solving techniques they have developed in the past. Often, however, because the situation is different, those techniques do not work as they did earlier. This can leave the individual feeling a greater sense of threat than before, but it can also lead the person to try other techniques. The experimentation of these new techniques can become a growth experience for the individual, as well as a way out of the crisis. This is where an elder or deacon can be helpful, not in telling the person what to do, but rather in working with them to discover new techniques, and then shepherding them with love and support as they use these techniques to address their situation. Elders and deacons can help the person develop both the techniques and a strategy for their use based on their assessment of the crisis. This assessment includes focusing on the needs within the crisis, utilizing the strengths of the person in crisis, as well as those around them, including the church, and encouraging the person to make their own decisions and assume responsibility. This approach not only positively addresses the whole of the crisis, but it also empowers the individual involved and enables them to grow from the situation.

It is possible to grow from a crisis. For growth to occur, however, the crisis must be dealt with constructively, and this is another avenue that elders and deacons can provide assistance. Dealing with a crisis constructively involves facing and acknowledging the problem, or problems and having the courage to explore and understand them better, including where they might have originated. It is also important for the person to work through any negative emotions, and accept responsibility for their decisions. The elder or deacon can then guide them to explore all possible solutions, sort out what can and cannot be changed, and plan a strategy for dealing with the crisis. This process also necessitates that the individual is willing to accept themselves as they are, communicate openly with others, and put their decisions into action.

Remember, it is the person's perception of the crisis that is important, more so than the crisis itself, because that is what the person is really reacting to. If an elder or deacon can help the individual sort through the web of problems and perceptions and arrive at a place where they can begin working through them rather than being consumed by them, then the process of healing and resolution will have begun. Regardless of the person or situation, when dealing with a crisis, it is always important for an elder or deacon to seek God's will and guidance through prayer. As Rudolph Grantham points out, "The Christian's response to crisis is intimate communication with God through prayer and Scripture and the special supportive help and prayer of family, friends, and the Christian community."² The advantage that a lay minister brings to a crisis situation, as opposed to a secular counselor, is that, as a spiritual leader within the church, they are aware that God is in control, and they can communicate God's ability to create wholeness

² Grantham, *Lay Shepherding*, 33.

and resolution in even the worst of situations. This advantage, when humbly and wisely exercised can make a lasting and meaningful difference in the life of a person in crisis.

Leadership

There are some people who appear to be natural leaders, while others who generally prefer to let others take the lead. Regardless of the type of person an elder or deacon is, however, leadership ability is crucial, because a person's leadership ability determines their potential for effectiveness and the possible impact they can have. In general, the tendency is that leaders initiate and followers react. The ministry of service that elders and deacons are called to requires individuals who are able to initiate. So leadership becomes a key component of an elder's or deacon's ability to succeed in their service to God, the church and others.

It is important to understand that leadership is a collection of skills, rather than a skill itself. This also means that, as a collection of skills, it is developed over time, instead of learned all at once. It does not matter, therefore, whether an elder or deacon is a novice, or has years of leadership experience; in both instances, the individual can always continue to grow in their leadership ability and hone their skills. Regardless of a person's leadership background, developing leadership skills requires a willingness to grow and the self-discipline to do what is necessary for that growth to occur. As with the development of any skill, whether it involves sports, music, science or leadership, the foundation for that development is self-discipline. Without it, the process of developing will be haphazard and ineffectual, and growth will become more accidental than

intentional. Growth in leadership is possible, as long as the person has a sincere desire to grow, and a willingness to work at making that growth happen.

As a person continues to develop their leadership abilities, it is also critical that they work to develop trust among the people they need to lead. Trust is foundational for effective leadership. Elders and deacons build trust through action, by achieving results, and by owning mistakes when they are made. The decisions a leader makes also affect the trust they build. As John Maxwell aptly illustrates, it is like pocket change. “Each time you make a good leadership decision, it puts change into your pocket. Each time you make a poor one, you have to pay some of your change to the people.”³ It is very important, therefore, for the leader to remain focused on their organization, in the lay minister’s case, the church, rather than on themselves. This focus in leadership will enable the elder or deacon to make the best choice, even when faced with the difficult situation of having more than one good choice. By remaining focused on the church and the church’s mission, instead of on themselves, they can choose among the various options by considering which one is best for the purpose of the church, and not being distracted by personal opinions or agendas.

Being a leader is more than being out front, it’s having people who are willing to follow. This is why leadership is measured in influence, because effective leadership influences people to follow. Influence is especially important in volunteer organizations, such as the church, because, unlike a paid work situation, a person’s position does not necessarily matter. What matters to a volunteer is being valued and respected for their efforts. Volunteers, as well as paid workers, need to know that they are cared for. This is critical for successful leadership because, as John Maxwell points out, “People don’t care

³ John C. Maxwell, *Leadership 101* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2002), 45.

how much you know until they know how much you care. Leadership begins with the heart, not the head.”⁴ This caring style of leadership is the leadership style modeled by Jesus, the best example of a leader for elders and deacons to follow. A caring leader is a servant leader; a person who puts others needs ahead of their own agenda, is secure and confident enough to serve, initiates service to others, does not focus on position or rank, and is motivated by love. Caring servant leadership is the type of leadership that will enable elders and deacons to serve effectively and meaningfully in ministry, and make a difference in the lives of those they serve.

Teamwork

Teamwork is critical to all great achievements. It provides more perspectives, ideas, support and resources, and it enhances strengths and minimizes weaknesses overall. Teamwork builds up every member of the team by providing opportunities otherwise unavailable to individuals, and by encouraging accountability. Whether the objective involves sports teams, military forces, businesses, or churches, the truth that John Maxwell points out in his book, *Relationships 101*, remains the same, “Individuals play the game, but teams win championships.”⁵ Considering the complexity and scope of the ministry entrusted to elders and deacons in a church, not to mention the importance of their work with the members of the church who are in need, teamwork is essential, and the greater the task or challenge, the greater the need for a team approach.

The Bible teaches in Genesis 1:27 that humans are created in the image of God, and since Christians believe that God exists in Trinitarian relationship, as Father/Creator,

⁴ Maxwell, *Leadership 101*, 76.

⁵ John C. Maxwell, *Relationships 101* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2003), 8.

Son/Savior and Holy Spirit/Sustainer, it stands to reason that humans are also created to exist in community and be interdependent with one another. This community and interdependence suggests that teamwork should be an integral component of life together, and yet in many ages, including present day, individualism is prized over team effort in many areas of society. Some reasons that can cause people to stand alone and resist working as a team include ego, insecurity, naïveté, and personal temperament, but regardless of the reason, this approach is counter to God's created intentions, and will prove to be insufficient in serving God's people in ministry. As has already been discussed, the Bible also teaches that in the Body of Christ, that is, the church, all persons are equal and dependent upon one another. God has given each person unique gifts, and all people need one another and the sharing of each one's gifts for God's ministry to be fulfilled, God's church to be nurtured, and God's people to be cared for. Regardless of the mindset of the world, elders and deacons need to function as a team, not only among themselves, but also within the church as a whole. It is important they understand that they are not more important than any other member of the church, only gifted and called for a particular ministry or service within the Body of Christ.

Teamwork requires that the group, in this case the elders or deacons, be intentional about building themselves up as a team. Building a team is not necessarily difficult, but it does necessitate a positive attitude toward being a team, as well as a commitment to the time and effort needed for team-building. Once these components are in place, a team can be developed by simply doing things together as a team. This can include the work of ministry and other official duties and responsibilities, but it is vital that it also includes non-church activities as well. A strong and cohesive team is built

when the team members develop relationships with one another outside of the work and ministry context. This allows bonds to be created beyond those of the church, and allows the whole self to be brought into the team.

A good team is characterized by the care they have for one another, as well as open communication within the group and a willingness to grow together. An attitude of loyalty and trust is critical among the members; and a strong team will not only respect all others on their team, but they will also recognize and honor the value of each person's role and gifts, no matter how different they are from their own. Teams can also be identified by a common goal and purpose, whereas individuals each have their own ideas and agendas. In fact, a single-minded mission is one of the characteristics that gives a team a great advantage over individuals, because all of the time, efforts, gifts and talents of all of the members of the team are shared and unified in achieving that mission. Members of a good team know what is important, they value interdependence over independence, and they are willing to put the team's interest above their self. They are committed to the goal and purpose of the team and are willing to do their part in bringing them to fulfillment.

Intentionally developing and nurturing the characteristics discussed above will transform a group of elders or deacons into a team and will multiply their effectiveness in the service and ministry they are called to. In addition, as a team, elders and deacons should pray for one another, for the team and team unity, for the team's purpose, and for the people and ministries they are called to serve. When elders and deacons work together as a team, not only do they all grow and benefit from their teamwork, but the Body of Christ is strengthened and enlarged as well.

Prayer

Prayer has been recognized as an important component of the spiritual life for centuries. The Gospel of Luke tells of Jesus' disciples seeking instruction in prayer. "Jesus was praying in a certain place, and after he had finished, one of his disciples said to him, 'Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples'" (Luke 11:1). It is important to understand that Jesus' disciples sought more than technical instruction. As faithful Jews they had been praying for years. Rather, Jesus' disciples sought what Christians still seek today, a close, personal connection with the Divine, the intimate relationship with God that Jesus enjoyed in his own life. Prayer is about seeking a connection and a relationship with God, and when elders and deacons pray for others, they humbly seek to be a conduit for that connection and relationship for the one they are praying for.

Prayer uses words, but it is so much more than words; it is a connection with God. In her book *Praying All Ways*, Caroljean Willie explains, "There are many definitions of prayer, but definitions cannot touch the heart of prayer, whose essence is relationship."⁶ Prayer makes a difference because of this relationship, because it is a relationship with the God who created and controls all of life. This is why prayer, in all aspects of life, is so critical; and it also explains why prayer in difficult times, regardless of what the difficulty is, is so essential. All prayer, both personal and intercessory, connects those praying and those prayed for in relationship with God, and, it is this connection that makes prayer so central to the caring ministry of elders and deacons.

The intercessory prayers of lay ministers will generally fall into two categories, prayers for others prayed in the privacy of the elder's or deacon's own prayer time, and prayers prayed out loud in the presence of and for the benefit of those who are in need. It

⁶ Caroljean Willie, *Praying All Ways* (Orlando, FL: Harcourt Religion Publishers, 1999), 2.

is this latter category that many well-meaning and spiritually-sound elders and deacons continue to be intimidated by. All too often, praying out loud in front of others, unless it is at the dinner table, seems like a daunting task better left to pastors. Public intercessory prayer, however, is part of the call of all Christians, and this not only includes elders and deacons, but as spiritual leaders and examples in the church, they also have a role in modeling this type of prayer for others as well.

An elder's or deacon's ability to pray begins with a willingness to pray. The elder or deacon must be open to developing the habit and discipline of prayer, and this involves a readiness to let go of their fears, self-doubts and insecurities about prayer. In order to learn to pray, a person needs to assume the same humility as the disciples did, and then echo their request, "Lord, teach us to pray" (Luke 11:1a). God's response will not only be to send the Holy Spirit as a guide and nurturer, but also to point the honest seeker to Jesus' great lesson on prayer. This lesson is found in the prayer that is commonly called, the Lord's Prayer. It is perhaps the best known prayer among Christians, and is repeated in churches around the world in numerous languages each and every day. In addition to its use as a prayer, however, it is an ideal archetype for all prayers as well. This is what Jesus was providing, not only a prayer to be repeated, but also a prayer to be modeled.

The Lord's Prayer begins where all prayers must begin, with God. Prayer has to center on God, or it is not really prayer. It is also important to remember that prayer is a conversation with God, and, as Jesus directs through his use of the familial term "Father," it is an intimate conversation based on love and trust. Following the model of the Lord's Prayer means that elders and deacons can pray using the elements provided by Jesus, rather than approaching prayer as a totally blank slate that they must spontaneously

create. The Lord's Prayer teaches lay ministers to pray aloud in front of others by using the following components: address God, give praise to God, give God thanks for what God has done and given, confess honestly, ask for protections and provision, ask for help with needs, ask to be used by God to help others, and submit our wills to God's will. Every prayer does not need to contain all of these elements, but a combination of them will create a great prayer each time. Depending on the purpose of the prayer, one particular component may be emphasized more than others. For example, when praying to give thanks for a meal, there would be a greater emphasis on words of praise and thanks, whereas in a prayer for someone in the hospital, asking for the person's needs, as well as for God's protection and provision would be emphasized. Regardless of the situation, an elder or deacon who is well-versed in the Lord's Prayer as a model for prayer will always be ready to pray with faith and confidence.

Prayer is an essential component of the Christian life, because, as Caroljean Willie points out, "It is an ongoing call and response between God and us that moves us toward him. God's call and our response are not single isolated events, but an ongoing relationship between people very much in love."⁷ Prayer is critical for all ministries, including the elder's and deacon's ministry of service and caring. Their willingness and ability to pray will contribute heavily to both their effectiveness and their confidence, because not only will they be connecting God to the person in need, but they will also be connecting with God themselves, and God is the one who equips, empowers and sustains all who are called to ministry. Prayer taps into God's love and power, not just for the one in need, but for the elders and deacons as well.

⁷ Willie, *Praying All Ways*, 2.

Mahatma Gandhi once said that we must become the change we wish to see in the world. Praying any prayer, regardless of whether it is publically spoken or privately whispered, connects both those praying and those prayed for in relationship with God, who is able to answer all prayers, heal all hurts, comfort all struggles, bring peace to chaos and make all things new and whole, according to God's will, which is always based in God's great love.

Use of Scripture

The Bible is comprised of sixty-six books, written over a period of about 1,500 years, by over forty authors from all walks of life, with different kinds of personalities, and in all sorts of situations. It was written in three languages on three continents, and it covers hundreds of controversial subjects. Yet, it fits together into one cohesive story with an appropriate beginning, a logical ending, a central character, and a consistent theme. The Bible contains history, adventure, poetry, and wisdom, but it is much more than all of that. The Bible is a love story, a story about God's love for humanity. All of the scriptures and stories, from Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden to the revelation made to John on the Island of Patmos describe and explain this love and the relationship God desires to have with humanity as a result of that love. Throughout its many pages, the Bible tells the stories, offers the lessons, provides the examples, and shows the way to be in the relationship with God that God intends. This is important because it is this relationship that humans have been created for; and being connected with God and God's love can heal our wounds, comfort our hearts, offer us peace and make us whole.

The words of scripture represent tremendous resources for offering comfort, hope and meaning in the midst of difficult situations. It is important, therefore, that elders and deacons are familiar with their Bibles, both the overall message of God's love in general, and some of the particular scriptures that can be helpful in specific circumstances and situations. This familiarity is something that can continually be developed, and is helpful for all Christians, not just lay ministers. Remember, scripture is God's Word for God's people, so when it is shared, it can be as though God is speaking to the heart of the person in need.

Be careful, however, in how scripture is used. As much hope, guidance and comfort as it can offer in the right context and when shared at the right moment, it can also have an unsettling effect when used inappropriately. For example, when scripture is quoted in an effort to "fix" what the person is feeling, rather than compassionately sitting with them in the midst of their emotions, or when it is used as "filler" for difficult silences, or situations when it is hard, or even impossible to know what to say, then the scripture is not being used as God intended it to be, and the person in need can be left with even more hurt, confusion and frustration. Scripture is God's Word; it is one of the ways God communicates God's love, grace and promises to God's people, or, as one biblical writer put it, "All scripture is inspired by God, and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, so that everyone who belongs to God may be proficient, equipped for every good work." (2 Tim 3:16) It is also important, therefore, when sharing scripture, to be careful of proof-texting, which is pulling out a verse and using it to mean what you want it to mean. This practice also causes more harm than good, because it ignores the broader context of the verse and subverts God's

intention for that scripture. So, when quoting scripture, be aware of the entire context of the verse and keep it in that context. Share the scripture appropriately, as a selective supplement to caring communication and to undergird the elder's or deacon's words of encouragement, reassurance and hope.

Scripture is vital to the Christian life because scripture, as God's Word, reveals God to us. This is what John Calvin meant when he said, "As our eyes sometimes need glasses through which to see the things of this world, our souls always need the Scriptures through which to see the workings of God."⁸ Scripture offers us and those in need, meaning and application for our lives because it connects God with human life. If used correctly, this can be a powerful resource when providing caring service to others. The scriptures can be the lens through which people see how God is, or even might be working in their lives and through their situations. The presence of God in our lives and circumstances, particularly in tough times, gives us the sense that we are not alone, that God does care, and that we can trust that God is in control and will see us through.

As significant as this may be, however, there is a caution to be heeded. Be cautious about subjecting a person to your interpretation about how a scripture applies to their life. You may be correct in both your assessment and interpretation, but it is important to begin the conversation with what the other person understands the scripture to mean for them, and then build from that point. Remember also that, while the scriptures are God's Word and can be very helpful, caring service is about the person in need and their situation; it is not an opportunity for a Bible study, and much less a debate on theology or doctrine.

⁸ Leroy Howe, *A Pastor in Every Pew: Equipping Laity for Pastoral Care* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 2000), 128.

As an elder or deacon, the Bible is a great resource for connecting people to God through God's Word. Always remember that, regardless of the specific scripture used in a particular situation, the entire Bible is set in the broader context of its primary message, which is God's love, forgiveness and desire for relationship with humanity. When shared appropriately and with this mindfulness, scripture has the potential to be a catalyst for acceptance and healing, and can provide the foundation for a stronger connection with God that will, in turn, offer an individual in need even greater hope, meaning and comfort than caring words alone.

Active Listening

It is remarkable that, as many people on the planet who have the physical ability to hear, only a small percentage of these are able to truly listen to another person. This discrepancy is largely due to the misperception that hearing is listening, but, in fact, listening is so much more. Rudolph Grantham explains that "Listening is more than hearing with the ear. It is entering into the inner world of another with the purpose of being with, accepting, understanding, and helping the person understand his or her own self."⁹ Active listening is first and foremost an attitude, an attitude toward the person being listened to. It requires a willingness to enter another person's world on their terms, and then to be with them there. This enables the individual doing the listening to understand that person from their perspective, rather than assuming an understanding based on their own perspective. Active listening requires patience, commitment and love, and when the effort is genuinely made, the results will be fulfilling for both parties.

⁹ Grantham, *Lay Shepherding*, 69.

Given the importance of listening, especially in times of crisis and need, becoming a good listener with active listening skills is critical for elders and deacons. To develop active listening skills, an elder or deacon must first practice giving the other person their undivided attention. This may not be easy if there are many distractions, such as in a hospital setting, or if the elder or deacon is experiencing fear or uncertainty, or if they have something else on their mind, but it is crucial to active listening. A lay minister needs to learn how to set aside other issues and look past distractions, as well as to know when they cannot do this, and then postpone the visit or interaction until they can. It is essential that elders and deacons make listening a priority as they serve in their ministry of caring, because listening fosters healing, builds loyalty, increases knowledge, and builds relationships. This might seem like an exaggeration of the importance of listening, but because listening requires time, energy, and, to an extent, sacrifice, the willingness to listen communicates a genuine interest and caring for the person in need. This interest and caring resonates with the individual and results in many positive outcomes.

Good listening also requires that the elder or deacon not interrupt the person speaking. Often, whether we are aware of it or not, interrupting is the result of not being entirely focused on what the other person is saying. The listener might have been focused in the beginning, but something has started their mind going and their focus has shifted away from what the individual is saying to what they are thinking. When this happens, they will inevitably develop thoughts of their own that they feel they need to share, and they interrupt because they have shifted away from the world of the person speaking and into their own world, where they have a pressing thought to share.

Remember, when you are listening it is critical to focus on the person speaking, not on yourself. It is important to be engaged in what the person is saying, but active listening is different than a conversation, so engagement in listening means offering affirmative responses that encourage the person to continue sharing. These responses can include non-verbal head nods and body posture, as well as brief reactions, such as “uh huh,” “I see,” “tell me more,” and “yes.” The elder or deacon can also sum up the conversation periodically and ask questions for clarity. Above all, active listening requires elders and deacons to exercise patience, especially when the communication is difficult and the person struggles to find words or form sentences, but it is important and it can make a significant impact on the person’s healing and wholeness.

Another key to active listening is to focus on finding and understanding the meaning of what is being said. This meaning may be found in the words themselves, which is why it is important to give full attention to the person talking, without distractions, judgments, personal conclusions, arguments or interruptions. Often, however, much of what is being conveyed by the individual communicating is done so through non-verbal means. Developing the ability to ‘listen’ to what is not actually spoken is as important as the spoken words when an elder or deacon is trying to find and understand the meaning of what the person is sharing. This is because, as Leroy Howe points out, “The ultimate aim of listening is for us to hear what is beyond, behind, and beneath surface disclosures, what another is trying to get at more than what his or her words convey literally, explicitly, and directly.”¹⁰ Real meaning will always be found in a compilation of verbal and non-verbal signals, making both equally important to ‘listen’ to. Non-verbal communication can be found in the emotions, or lack thereof that a

¹⁰ Howe, *A Pastor in Every Pew*, 66.

person displays, in their physical appearance, in their mannerisms and body language, both conscious and unconscious, and in any repetitive behavior they might exhibit. A heightened awareness of these non-verbal signals will enable an elder or deacon to listen to much more than what is being said, and will enable them to offer more complete caring and service to the individual in need.

Another non-verbal signal that elders and deacons need to be aware of is silence. It may sound odd, but it is important to ‘listen’ to the silence in a conversation. Silence can signal either an attempt to withdraw from communicating for one reason or another, or to conceal something that is too difficult or painful to deal with. Silence can also be a time when the person is processing thoughts or feelings, reliving memories, or searching for a way to express themselves. In any case, silence should not be regarded as something to fill, but rather as an opportunity for connection and understanding. All too often today, there seems to be a resistance to silence. It tends to make people feel awkward or uncomfortable, so they rush to fill it with something, instead of valuing the gifts it offers. It is important for lay ministers to understand that silence is meaningful communication, and should be honored as the treasure it is. After all, it is only in the silence that God’s still small voice can be heard (1 Kgs 19:12).

The purpose of active listening is to enable a person in need to express what they are thinking and feeling without judgment or argument, and for the elder or deacon to find understanding and meaning in what is shared. The hope is that this will enable the elder or deacon to guide the other person toward a resolution or strategy for dealing with their need or crisis. Active listening is not easy; it requires commitment and sacrifice, and it necessitates continued effort toward the development of skills and focus in

listening situations. Real listening is important, however, because it conveys a willingness to spend time with the person in need, it communicates that they are worthy of that time, and it is an expression of love and compassion that mirrors God's own heart. If elders and deacons are willing to develop and share their active listening skills, they will touch the lives of those they minister to in a meaningful and lasting way.

Grief

It is virtually impossible for anyone to serve in ministry for any length of time and not face a situation involving grief. As much as we do not like to think about it, loss is a fact of life in this world east of Eden, and grief is the natural human reaction to loss. Rudolph Grantham sums it up well when he says, "Grief is one of the most commonly experienced human conditions."¹¹ So it is almost inevitable that elders and deacons will be called upon at some point in their service to minister to people who are grieving a loss in their lives. Such grief and loss are often equated with death, but in truth there are many additional forms of loss as well, including loss of a job, relationship, function, body part, ability, self-understanding, or home, which includes moving. Each of these losses bring with them a season of grief that must be acknowledged and worked through for the person to fully move forward. This is the role for both the pastor and lay ministers in the church, and it is a critical ministry, because it demonstrates God's compassion and love to the person who is grieving, enabling them to move closer to God, even in the midst of their loss.

It is important to understand what is meant by "grief," because grief is complex. It involves not only the emotional reaction to the loss, but it also engenders physical,

¹¹ Grantham, *Lay Shepherding*, 35.

social and spiritual reactions as well. Given this reality, it is imperative that elders and deacons be aware of the various aspects of grief, and that they remain alert for the manifestations of these aspects in the person's life. This will enable the elder or deacon to minister to the whole person, rather than just one part of them. The challenge in dealing with grief is that, while there are general steps that have been discussed and written about, there is really no predictable formula or timetable for the grieving process. Not only will each person react differently, but a single individual will also react differently to different losses and at different times in their life. Factors such as past experiences, personal beliefs and support systems will also affect a person's reaction to a loss, as well as how they can most effectively be ministered to. Sensitivity is crucial when ministering to a grieving person, because it allows the elder or deacon to tune in to the person's reaction and needs, rather than projecting their own ideas.

It is also good to understand that there are various forms of grief. Anticipatory grief is grief that occurs prior to the actual loss. This form of grief can be seen in a person, or family member of a person who has been diagnosed with a terminal illness, or someone who has been informed that their job is being eliminated. Anticipatory grief does not necessarily lessen the effect of grief when the actual loss occurs, it simply extends the grieving period, which makes the experience of grief after the loss different. Pathological grief is grief that continues for an extraordinary period of time with no significant signs of improvement, or grief that is overly intense for an extended period of time. It is important to understand that the term "pathological grief" refers only to the delayed resolution of grief, indicating that professional help may be warranted, and is not a negative judgment of the person grieving. Indicators of pathological grief include

continued withdrawal, denial, prolonged depression, suicidal thoughts, disorientation, significant personality changes, prolonged anger or guilt, and escape through alcohol, drugs, or even religious activity. If an elder or deacon suspects a person is experiencing pathological grief, they should continue to be lovingly present with the individual, while also making the pastor aware of the situation in a manner that does not break confidentiality or trust.

Grief is not a 'fun' process, for either the person experiencing it, or those supporting them, but it is a normal and healthy response to loss. Grieving allows the individual to accept the loss and work through the meaning of that loss for their life. Without this necessary work, painful as it may be at times, the person will be left with unresolved issues related to the loss, issues that can surface at a later date and cause even greater challenges than the initial experience of loss. Ministering to a person who is grieving is largely about listening to them and helping them mourn. This means encouraging them to experience and work through painful feelings, while affirming them and offering love and the assurance that they are not alone and that they are cared for. It is important that elders and deacon not rush this process, but rather allow the grieving person to move at their own pace, even if that means going back to the same issue again and again. It is possible that this can be an indicator that the person is 'stuck' at that place and may need additional guidance, but it is also an opportunity to exercise patience and compassion that may help them to come to terms with it and move forward. Rushing a person may cause them to move forward before they are ready, thereby forcing them to repress their true feelings, which, again, can result in unresolved issues and future pain.

When ministering to someone who is grieving, it is important to accept them as they are in the midst of their grief, and to encourage them to accept themselves as well. Offer the person support in their efforts to address their reactions and feelings, rather than repress or hide from them, even if those feelings are negative or scary. This will enable them to better work through their grief. Help them to find meaning in life again, and to accept and look toward a 'new normal' for their life. Do not be afraid to talk about the loss, or of causing tears or pain. Remember that tears are healing, and pain is a part of the grieving process. Let the person draw strength from you, and remind them that they are valued and loved just as they are, by you and by God. Encourage them to relate to life, to the extent that they are ready, to remain active and to do things for others. Any act of engagement in the world can help a grieving person see that they still have value to add to others, and this awareness can give them a sense of purpose and hope for the future.

Above all, and in all situations, confidentiality is imperative. As spiritual leaders in the church, elders and deacons are often entrusted with people's personal thoughts and feelings. It is critical to an elder's or deacon's functioning that they keep all ministering conversations confidential, unless the individual makes specific threats to their own self or others. In these situations, or if the elder or deacon ever feels that they are becoming overwhelmed, they should not hesitate to refer the person to the pastor.

Loss and grief may be inevitable factors of life, but being alone in the process of grieving need not be. Elders and deacons have a sacred call to care for people in need, including those who are grieving a loss. Their involvement can make a significant difference in the person's effort to work through their grief and come to a point of

acceptance and wholeness. This may be a call in which elders and deacons can feel unprepared and tend to shy away from. This reaction, however, leaves God out of the equation. God will always equip those whom God calls, so if an elder or deacon is called upon to minister to someone who is grieving, they need only to reach out to God in prayer and trust the guidance they receive. They will be successful in their ministry if they do not push or try to do too much, but rather be patiently present, letting their compassion and love for the person direct their words and actions.

Hospital Visits

It would not be unusual for an elder or deacon to be asked to visit a member of the church when they are in the hospital. These visits are an important part of caring for the congregation, and, while the pastor will be making visits as well, they may not be able to visit as often as they would like due to their other pastoral duties and responsibilities. As servant leaders, elders and deacons partner with the pastor to ensure that members are cared for and loved, and yet, hospital visits can be intimidating for some individuals. They may feel ill-equipped to minister to someone in the hospital, or they may be fearful of not knowing what to say or do in the presence of someone who is sick or hurt. Like many other skills and abilities integral to the elder's and deacon's work, however, those related to visitation can be learned and developed over time. As long as the elder or deacon has a willingness to reach out to people in their time of need, and a love that will enable them to overcome their fear, they will have the potential to not only make hospital visits, but to do so in a way that makes a difference in people's lives.

To begin with, remember that the patient's room is to be considered as private as their home. As an elder or deacon visiting, you are a guest. This mindset is important, because it will lead to many other appropriate actions that will seem to be common sense for a guest. For example, knock at the door upon arrival and wait for a response before entering. If there is no response, check with a nurse. It is possible that the patient could be sleeping or undergoing a procedure. If it is not possible to enter for one reason or another, leave a note of encouragement for the person with your name. Also, visit during visiting hours only, and do your best to avoid visiting during mealtimes. Often when an individual is sick their appetite is affected, but they need to eat in order to gain the strength to heal. Visiting at mealtimes can give the person a reason not to eat.

When you enter the room, be aware of others in the room. This can include other patients in semi-private rooms, family and medical staff. It is best to not have too large of a group, because it can be overwhelming for the patient. Be aware that it may be necessary to wait until others leave, or to come back at a different time. When you are able to be with the person, stand in line with their vision, rather than making them adjust to where you are. Also do not sit on, or even lean on the bed, especially if the patient has had surgery. During the visit, be cheerful, but not forcibly so, and if you are sick, tired, or depressed, it is best to defer the visit to a later day or time. It is always best to adjust to the patient's mood, rather than to have them adjust to yours. This includes the use of humor. Humor can have a wonderful healing effect, but only if it is appropriate in the given situation, and when it is not a substitute for a real and meaningful conversation that might be difficult. In general, stay relaxed and be aware of your own feelings. Remember that the visit is for the patient's benefit, not yours. If the visit is disturbing or

unsettling, as some hospital visits can be, take care of yourself afterward by talking to a friend, family member, or pastor.

When speaking to the person, as much as possible, let them dictate the direction of the conversation. They may need to vent, share, or be consoled. Remember the purpose of the visit; it is more than a social visit. An elder's or deacon's purpose is to offer their self, including their time, compassion and talents. In this way, their purpose is directly related to patient's needs, so it becomes critical that, during a conversation, they not be cut off from what they need to talk about in order to pursue a pre-determined line of discourse. In fact, it is generally a good rule to try to listen more than you talk. Listening can often be the most valuable part of a hospital visit. In addition, be careful to avoid negative discussions about outside situations and events, and do not argue about politics, beliefs, or any other controversial issues, including religion. Avoid offering medical information, advice, or opinions, even if asked. It is important not to damage the patient's faith in their doctor and medical staff. Also, do not ask the person about their diagnosis, it could be embarrassing. Instead, ask them how things are going in general, and let them guide the conversation. If they want to talk about their diagnosis, or treatment for that matter, they will. Above all, do not whisper in front of the person, even if the conversation is not about them, and even if they appear to be asleep. Whispering can cause the individual's fear level to escalate, which is neither healthy, nor helpful for them. In fact, be aware of vocal levels in general, including laughter. You will need to speak at a level consistent with person's hearing ability and needs, but also be aware that, depending on their condition, loud noises can irritate or fatigue someone who is sick or recovering.

In general, a hospital visit should last five to ten minutes, unless the patient asks you to remain longer. Be careful not to tire the person out. They may be lonely and tired of being constrained to bed, but they also need rest for healing. In assessing the length of a visit and whether to stay longer if asked, consider the person's condition, both physical and emotional, your relationship with the individual, and the purpose of your visit. Remember that hospital visits for elders and deacons are different than for pastors. The laity communicates the love and concern of the patient's spiritual community, while the pastor deals with more intimate personal and spiritual concerns.

When the visit is over, it is appropriate to offer to say a prayer for the person, but don't push. If the person declines the prayer, it is not a reflection on the elder or deacon, but rather an indication of something personal for them. Even the offer of a prayer lets the patient know that they are cared for and loved, and the elder or deacon can tell the person that they will pray for them personally and privately. In most cases, however, people will be very appreciative of offered prayers, so when you pray, remember that prayers should be short and positive. Pray for the person, their family and the medical staff, but do be careful to be realistic in the prayer, and not to create "promises" that may not happen.

Hospital visits are a vital part of the ministry of the church, because they let those in need, as well as their families, know that they are cared for and worthy of love. In fact, Rudolph Grantham believes that "Visitation is a ministry of love. It fulfills the Second Commandment of Jesus that we love our neighbor as ourselves."¹² Elders and deacons are called to ministries of caring service, and there is no better way to express caring and compassion than by taking the time to visit someone who is in the hospital.

¹² Grantham, *Lay Shepherding*, 52.

The five to ten minutes spent in the visit will make a significant difference in the life of that person, and possibly in their spiritual life as well.

Nursing Home Visits

Much of what has been discussed about hospital visits also applies to visits to a person in a nursing or retirement home. There are, however, a few differences that elders and deacons should be aware of as they embark on this important ministry of caring and service. When thinking about nursing home visits, it is also helpful to remember that, since most of the individuals involved are advanced in their age, often to the point that they have lost spousal support, this particular ministry closely mirrors the call to the seven men in Acts 6:1-7. While these men are never actually called “deacons,” their call to serve the widows of the community, which is possibly the earliest account of a called ministry of service, can offer today’s deacons, as well as contemporary elders a guide for their own ministries to the senior population within the church, including those living in nursing and retirement homes. As discussed earlier, they were chosen because they were well-known as men of spiritual maturity and wisdom, and would, therefore, reflect God’s love for the widows as they dealt sensitively and effectively with the distribution of food and provisions. If today’s deacons and elders can also reflect God’s love and sensitively and effectively minister to those they serve, then they, too, will succeed in their mission.

With nursing home visits, remember that, in most cases, residents cannot and, therefore, will not return to their homes. This may leave them feeling lonely and even abandoned, and they can also feel disconnected from a sense of “home.” It is also important to be aware that many people view a nursing home as the last stop before

death, so giving up is common. For these and other related reasons, advance prayer and planning can be a critical element of nursing home visits. If an elder or deacon familiarizes themselves with the person and their particular situation, and then spends some time praying for God's guidance and wisdom, their advance efforts can make the visit go better for everyone involved.

Above all, it is crucial that the elder or deacon offer hope. Hope is more than wishful thinking, it is a powerful force that connects an individual to their future and makes that future conceivable, and, therefore, possible. Hope is rooted in a person's past experiences, because it is from that perspective that they can remember how difficult situations have been overcome in the past. A person's experiences also offer them the strength that comes from the memories of family and friends, whether those memories involve advice, examples, or simply love. If an elder or deacon can help the person recall these times, experiences and memories, they can unlock the valuable resource of hope. Hope is also rooted in future experiences, so, in addition to helping a person look back on their life, it is also helpful to guide them in looking forward to better times. Finally, hope is simultaneously rooted in the present. Even as a person looks to the past and the future, they also need to look to what they have in the present moment. Ultimately, life is lived in the present, so as helpful as the past and future can be, if the elder or deacon does not also weave in the present, the person's hope will be incomplete. Resources for building hope can be found in the person's family, friends, community, church, and faith. One caution when offering a person hope; as powerful as it is, be careful not to promise success or a future that is unrealistic. Doing so will only create future difficulties and destroy trust.

Conflict Management

It is most unfortunate, but it seems that conflict is a fact of life. Conflict occurs within businesses, government and family situations, and conflict also occurs within the church. As spiritual leaders in the church, it is critical that elders and deacons be aware of how to manage conflict, because conflict is detrimental to the church, both in terms of the individual members and the organizational structure. It affects the morale of the members, as well as the sense of unity that is so central to a church. It also makes people feel discouraged and can cause them to stop giving their time or money, or even to leave the church, the denomination, and in some cases, their faith. Conflict can bring about the resignation of volunteers, paid staff and ministers, and can even cause the church to split. Conflict can destroy a church, but it does not have to. If dealt with in a positive and constructive manner, conflict can actually enable a church to grow and be strengthened. By virtue of their position, elders and deacons have influence in the church, and, therefore, can be an integral part of both avoiding conflict in the first place, and helping to guide it in a positive direction when it does occur.

Church conflict generally erupts when any two or more members or groups within the church disagree, oppose, or in some other way clash with each other. Very often, these disagreements and oppositions can be prevented before they begin. Elders and deacons can offer a valuable service to the church by learning to identify the causes of conflict and then, once identified, address the situation before it grows. There can be many causes of conflict within a church, including stress, either personal or within a group, confusion or misunderstanding, the use or misuse of power, changes in the church or community, poor communication, unmet needs, whether real or perceived, fear, which

causes an emotional response, and the differences among members, such as age, gender, economic factors, political views and length of membership. These roots of conflict can sometimes be identified and rectified before they create any issues. If conflict does erupt, however, it is important that elders and deacons deal with the issues promptly and effectively in an effort to keep the conflict under control. They can facilitate this by patiently listening to the concerns of those involved, approaching all individuals with love and compassion, and modeling Christian maturity for everyone. It can also be helpful if they are familiar with the procedures and operations of the church, including those that are both written and unwritten.

When dealing with conflict, it is important that the elder or deacon have an awareness of their own feelings about the conflict situation, as well as the individuals involved. This awareness will enable them to better manage their own feelings so that they do not adversely affect their efforts in dealing with the conflict. Even subconscious thoughts, such as past experiences with specific people, or conflict in general can derail an elder's or deacon's attempts at constructive resolution. In addition, patience and love are also critical in dealing with conflict. An elder or deacon needs to take the time to patiently listen to all sides of the conflict and be kind to everyone involved, regardless of their comments or actions. Their patience can go a long way toward calming others down and encouraging them to listen to one another, even if they do not agree. This willingness to listen, then, paves the way toward future discussions and mediation if necessary.

Love is always the best resource in confronting and resolving conflict. The old adage that "like begets like" applies here, as it also does with patience. It is imperative

that elders and deacons respond to conflict with a spirit of Christian love, because this spirit will help them to not get caught up themselves in the conflict, and it will also foster a sense of general goodwill among those involved in the conflict. All too often, conflicts escalate because they are dealt with in negative ways by individuals who are, themselves, involved, or at least invested in the conflict. Patience and love are strong, positive forces that can turn the tide of the negativity and open people to constructive solutions.

Even the worst conflict can be resolved in one way or another. Whether that resolution has a positive or negative effect on the church is largely a matter of how the conflict, the issues involved, and the people are handled. Listening sensitively to all sides is key in successful conflict management. This willingness to listen not only affords everyone involved the value of having their concerns heard, but it also enables the elder or deacon to work on another critical element in resolution, which is discerning the real issue. In many instances, and especially in situations where the conflict has grown and festered for a while, the first concerns that are expressed will actually be secondary issues that have resulted from the mishandling or lack of handling of the original source of conflict. These issues and concerns will need to be addressed as well for full resolution to be achieved, but until the core issue is identified and successfully addressed, a spark of conflict will remain. It can be very helpful to talk individually, or in small groups with those involved in an effort to avoid the temptation of a mob mentality, and at times, the presence of a mediator will be required for best results. Speaking to people directly is also best, making sure to give equal time for all parties to discuss their view of the conflict and its causes. It is important that when these discussions happen there are no interruptions allowed, and that all views are allowed to be expressed without argument or

judgments. Once the elder or deacon has been able to weed through all of the discussions and discern the core issue, they can try to negotiate a compromise solution that is acceptable to everyone. If this is not possible, they can also offer alternate solutions for achieving resolution. Above all, it will be important for the elder or deacon to lead the way in both modeling and guiding others in practicing Christian forgiveness.

Conflicts may be a fact of life, and while it is always best to pick up the signals of potential conflict early and solve issues before they occur, even when conflict does erupt, it can still yield positive and constructive results for the church if it is handled lovingly, patiently and in a Christian manner. This is where the elders' and deacons' ministry of service can truly benefit the church. Elders and deacons can exercise their influence and spiritual example in the church to lead the members out of conflict and into healing. Dealing with conflict takes time and is not easy. It can test the faith of those involved, including lay ministers, but if the elder or deacon is willing to endure the test and stay the course instead of giving up, they can influence a positive resolution and help to initiate growth, for both the church and the members.

Domestic Violence

It is estimated that one in four women around the world have been physically abused by an intimate male partner.¹³ If the numbers are added for children, seniors and men who are also abused, the results would be staggering, and the tragic picture of domestic violence would become frightening clear. Domestic abuse cuts across classifications of culture, race, religion, location and economic standing, and the belief

¹³ The RAVE Project, "FAQS: How common is abuse in intimate relationships," The RAVE Project, <http://www.theraveproject.com> (accessed November 21, 2011).

that “Christians do not do such things” is a myth. It is a threat that strikes at the heart of American society, which is the family, and it is one that the church needs to acknowledge and address.

An important starting point is to understand better what domestic violence is, and to set some of the myths about it straight. Domestic violence is not limited to physical violence, even though that is how it is often characterized. In fact, many women would deny that they are being abused, simply because there is no physicality involved in the abuse. The truth is that domestic violence involves any action that is meant to control, shame, hurt or humiliate another person. This includes name calling, threats or demeaning comments, limiting or withholding access to food, money or other resources, and demanding sex, as well as physical assaults. The abuse may be physical, but it may also be emotional, sexual, relational, or controlling. In fact, many women have reported that emotional abuse can be more painful than physical abuse. Regardless of the form it takes, domestic violence is wrong and should never be excused or ignored.

Abusive behavior is primarily about control. Abusers have a need to control what is going on in their home, including the lives of their family members. As James Berkley argues, “In one way, spouse abuse is like suicide: the offender can think of no other suitable act to adequately express the depth of their anger and frustration.”¹⁴ This need for control can come from many sources, including mental problems, bad choices, low self-esteem and a history of being abused and feeling out of control themselves. The tragic reality is that more than half of all abused men witnessed or experienced abuse in

¹⁴ James D. Berkley, *Called into Crisis: The Nine Greatest Challenges of Pastoral Care* (Dallas, TX: Word Publishing, 1989), 87.

their childhood homes.¹⁵ Violence is a learned behavior, and the cycle of abuse is all too often passed from one generation to the next. Growing out of their need for control, abusers also frequently feel a sense of entitlement, and when they think they are not getting what they deserve, they use violence to punish the family member they deem to be responsible, or to re-establish their control in the household, or both.

There is a popular belief that substance abuse, whether involving alcohol or drugs, is a cause of domestic violence. In fact, however, “the majority (76 percent) of physically abusive incidents occur in the absence of alcohol use and there is no evidence to suggest that alcohol use or dependence is linked to the other forms of coercive behaviors that are part of the pattern of domestic violence.”¹⁶ The greater likelihood is that the same need for control and low self-esteem that prompts abuse also feeds the abusers addiction. It is true that many male offenders also abuse alcohol or drugs, and that the use of these substances can increase the lethality of the violence, but it is not true that the substance is the root cause of domestic violence. It is critical, therefore, that domestic violence and substance abuse be recognized and treated as two separate problems.

As daunting as the task may appear, it remains crucial that the church, led by pastors and lay leaders alike, take a firm stand against domestic violence and be ready to assist those who are currently being affected. Not only are the victims of the abuse at great risk, but there can be indirect victims as well, and these are often children. A home that is touched by violence is not an environment where children can grow, flourish, or be happy. Abuse, even if experienced indirectly, affects their school performance, their

¹⁵ The RAVE Project, “FAQS: How common is abuse in intimate relationships.”

¹⁶ The RAVE Project, “FAQS: How common is abuse in intimate relationships.”

friendships, their view of family and their self-esteem, not to mention putting them at risk for becoming abusers someday themselves. It is vital, therefore, that the church break its silence with regard to domestic violence and follow the example of Jesus and bring good news to those in need, to proclaim release to the captives and to let the oppressed go free (Luke 4:18).

Once the church has accepted this call, it is important that the spiritual leaders understand the challenges involved. One of the chief obstacles in dealing with domestic violence is the fear that it engenders in its victims. There can be fear of retaliation, fear of escalating violence, fear of abandonment or fear of withheld resources. This fear is real, and it often leads to secrecy, so while a victim of abuse may feel alone, afraid and abandoned, they will frequently remain silent and keep their dark secret, rather than expose themselves to judgment, shame, or guilt. Sometimes this secrecy is coerced. A victim may be pressured by the abuser to keep silent and to pretend that everything is alright in their home and in their relationship. It is also possible that victims remain secretive about the abuse because they blame themselves instead of the abuser for the violence they are experiencing. They may believe that they somehow deserve the punishment, that the abuser is justified in their actions, or that things would be fine if only they were better, faster, neater, more efficient, or more of something they are not.

The fear, secrecy and blame associated with domestic abuse exacts a great deal of energy from victims, often leaving them with little power to take action for themselves. For this reason, pastoral care to victims of domestic violence can be a lifeline. Reaching out and offering support and assistance can enable them to believe in themselves and empower them to make a change in their lives. When talking to a victim of domestic

abuse, one of the most important things to offer them is validation. Especially if the abuse has been kept secret for a long period of time, letting them know that they are believed can be very affirming and empowering. Be aware of cryptic comments that may be the person's way of trying to break through the secrecy, and do not promise absolute confidentiality. Depending upon the situation, it may be necessary, for either moral or legal reasons, to notify others. Instead, explain to the person that you will honor their privacy as far as you can, but if you feel there is a danger, you may need to advise someone. Then, it is also critical to determine if it is safe for the person to return to the home, and to help them in finding temporary shelter if it is not. In some cases, the threat may also extend to the one helping, so church leaders need to be aware of their own safety as well, and the police should be contacted if there is violence in progress, or if an immediate danger is perceived.

Above all, pastoral care to victims of domestic violence involves demonstrating concern, compassion and love. It entails believing them, supporting them and offering them a sense of safety and security. This is an important ministry that has far-reaching benefits for the victims. It is an opportunity to truly help and care for the least of these, and to enable victims of domestic violence to become survivors of domestic violence.

Substance Abuse

Substance abuse has become an epidemic in both the United States and the world today. According to Dr. Anderson Spickard Jr. and Barbara Thompson, "substance abuse is the number one health problem in the United States, and the health costs related to drug

and alcohol use exceed one trillion dollars a year.”¹⁷ Considering the magnitude of these numbers, there is every reason to believe that members of churches are directly or indirectly impacted by substance abuse, and that lay leaders, including elders and deacons, may be called upon for pastoral care to these individuals. A broad understanding of substance abuse will enable spiritual leaders to support affected members of their congregations and guide them to a place of recovery and healing. The following discussion will focus primarily on alcoholism, which may be the most common form of substance abuse that church leaders will encounter, but the content can be applied to all forms of substance abuse.

To begin with, it is critical to be able to recognize and debunk the myths about alcoholism. First, there is no such thing as an “alcoholic personality.”¹⁸ The traits commonly associated with an alcoholic are a consequence, not a cause of alcoholism. Second, growing up in a broken home does not cause alcoholism.¹⁹ There is a greater risk for physical and emotional illness in children coming from broken homes, and such illnesses can lead a person to self-medicate with alcohol or drugs, but a broken home does not, in and of itself, trigger alcoholism. Similarly, growing up with an alcoholic does not increase a child’s risk of becoming an alcoholic themselves. In fact, the opposite effect can often result, with children growing up with a greater awareness of the dangers of alcohol and being more likely to be cautious about their own drinking. And finally, genetics do not cause alcoholism directly, although they can increase an

¹⁷ Anderson Spickard Jr. MD and Barbara R. Thompson, *Dying For a Drink: What You and Your Family Should Know about Alcoholism* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2005), 2.

¹⁸ Spickard and Thompson, *Dying for a Drink*, 12.

¹⁹ Spickard and Thompson, *Dying for a Drink*, 12-13.

individual's susceptibility to addiction, making them vulnerable to becoming addicted to alcohol or another drug.

The truth is that there is no known physical cause for alcoholism. Personal crisis, trauma and other emotional stressors can increase a person's risk of becoming addicted as they use alcohol for its numbing qualities. Frequent drinking, as well as heavy drinking can lead to alcoholism, so a person who claims that they cannot have a drinking problem because they only have one or two drinks a day is misinformed, and possibly in denial. There is no "safe" amount of alcohol. A person's physical size, age, gender and metabolism all factor in, and some people simply have no tolerance at all and will be out of control in their drinking almost immediately. There is also no "safe" form of alcohol. An individual can become addicted while drinking beer and wine, just as surely as if they were drinking vodka or whisky. The only difference in the forms of alcoholic beverage is the concentration of alcohol they contain. The higher the concentration, as in the case of vodka and whisky, the faster the alcohol is absorbed into the body.

Regardless of how it happens, once a person is addicted, they are no longer in control and they will have a very difficult time breaking the addiction. Merely telling, or yelling at an alcoholic to stop drinking will have no effect, other than possibly angering or frustrating them. Once they are addicted, they have lost control of both when and how much they drink, and stopping is no longer that simple. Addiction is a complex combination of physical, emotional, social and spiritual factors; it affects the whole person. It is reasonable, then, that in helping someone address their alcoholism, it will be necessary to be mindful of all of these factors, and guide them to deal with the entire issue, rather than just one portion of it. It is also important that alcoholism is not taken

lightly, despite the almost comedic portrayal sometimes viewed in movies and on television.

While there are no known physical causes of alcoholism, there are plenty of physical effects of the drug. Alcohol is a depressant; it depresses the brain function and, in large quantities, anesthetizes the brain stem, which controls the heartbeat and respiration. There are also physical symptoms of alcohol addiction, including blackouts, night sweats, nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, hand tremors and impotence in men. Other early warning signs include a sense of shame or self-hatred, rigid or unpredictable behavior, mood swings, disruption in the family dynamic, being late for work or having unexplained absences, dropping out of their engagement in the faith community, blaming other, particularly for their drinking, projecting their self-hatred onto others and increasing their talk of suicide. If these signs and symptoms are not identified and an intervention made, the emotional, social and spiritual issues will worsen and the person may begin to experience flushing in their face, an enlarged nose, reddish palms, and medical complications, such as high blood pressure, heart trouble, cirrhosis of the liver, kidney failure and brain damage. The individual can also easily become addicted to other drugs, making their condition more serious, and recovery even more difficult.

There is hope, however, for someone who has become addicted, but it is essential that they receive help, because they are unlikely to be able to help themselves. This is where a compassionate pastoral caregiver can be instrumental. “Interfering” will not make the person’s drinking worse, as some may think. Alcoholism is a progressive disease; left on its own it can only get worse, never better. A lay leader can offer words of support and encouragement, and can help to cut through the debilitating reaction of

denial that is so typical in alcoholism. There may be, as is common among family members of the alcoholic, an instinct to simply protect and comfort the individual, but this instinct can have disastrous consequences. Not only does it contribute to enabling behavior, but it also delays help for the alcoholic and allows the disease to progress further. As they seek to help, it is additionally important that leaders in the faith community not be judgmental toward alcoholics, but rather provide spiritual support in a loving manner. An alcoholic who has been rejected by their church may also believe they have been rejected by God, and this belief can lead to an increase in their feelings of self-hatred and heighten both their denial and their drinking.

It is possible to help an alcoholic seek treatment and healing. One method that can often be quite effective is an intervention, which is an intentional meeting where the alcoholic is confronted about their drinking by friends and family members. It should be noted, however, that an intervention is most effective when it is conducted by someone who is trained and experienced. This is because an alcoholic will often not want to stop drinking, especially if they have been drinking for a long time. The longer the drinking has continued, the stronger the craving that is experienced and the harder it is for the person to think of quitting. A person who has been trained and has experience in conducting interventions will know how to orchestrate the meeting for maximum effectiveness and develop a plan for immediate assistance should the intervention be successful.

Regardless of the means of convincing the alcoholic to get help, there are many options for their recovery. There are in-patient facilities, intensive out-patient programs and support groups, such as AA, Alcoholics Anonymous. An individual's best chance

for recovery may involve one, or a combination of these options, and a therapist or medical professional should be consulted for the most helpful approach.

No discussion of alcoholism or substance abuse would be complete without a consideration of the needs of the family. An alcoholic's family is very much affected by their drinking and addiction. Alcoholism is the single greatest cause of domestic violence, and, like the alcoholic, the family experiences feelings of shame, embarrassment and denial. As a result of these feelings, as well as their good intentions, fears, sense of dependency, or their own emotional wounds, family members often develop enabling behavior that facilitates the alcoholic's addiction. Just as alcoholism is a complex issue for the alcoholic, so it is too for the family; and effective pastoral care will address the whole person of each family member, and help them to seek recovery also. Small groups such as Alanon and Alateen are designed and have been shown to be effective in aiding family members in their recovery from enabling behaviors and in experiencing healing, regardless of the actions of the alcoholic.

Alcoholism is completely preventable and highly treatable, and yet it has reached epidemic proportions in the United States and remains one of the least treated of all treatable chronic diseases. Certainly there are obstacles to treatment, including isolation, denial, social stigma and enabling behavior, but all of these can be overcome. The church, equipped with the Good News of God's saving love and grace, is perfectly positioned to come alongside those who are struggling with addictions and help to guide them toward the road to recovery in all aspects of the disease, physical, emotional, social and spiritual. Lay leaders can become an important source of hope and encouragement

for both the alcoholic and their family, and their willingness to be involved in this form of pastoral care can make a significant difference in their lives.

Interacting with Children

Challenging circumstances and crisis situations are not limited to adults. Children, too, experience difficult times and, at those times, are in need of pastoral care, possibly even more so than adults. Drawing upon a shepherding analogy of pastoral care, Andrew Lester, author of *Pastoral Care with Children in Crisis*, points out that “In fact, since the young lambs were the most defenseless, and because they represented the future, they probably received a disproportionate amount of the shepherd’s attention.”²⁰ And yet, all too often children are not given the same amount of attention as adults, and the consequences of this can be life-altering for the child. It is important, therefore, that lay leaders, including elders and deacons, be aware of the needs of children in crisis and equipped to shepherd them through those needs.

There are many possible reasons that adults are hesitant in their pastoral care of children, including the simple fact that they do not know how to approach them. It is true that children view the world differently than adults. They are not as cognitively and emotionally developed as adults are, and as a result they often do not know how to communicate what they are feeling and experiencing as adults would. This can create frustration for both parties and an impasse for pastoral care. Another reason that adults may be unwilling to extend pastoral care to children is that they do not believe they are in need of it. Children tend to have shorter attention spans than adults, largely due to the

²⁰ Andrew D. Lester, *Pastoral Care with Children in Crisis* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1985), 36.

influence of television, the internet and other media, and so it can be assumed that they are not aware of what is going on around them. In truth, children are aware and are affected, they simply express their awareness differently. Additionally, children exist largely in the present moment, rather than regretting past missteps and worrying about future implications, and as enviable as this trait may seem, it also has a downside. As Lester asserts, “Because children think very concretely, they can easily distort events and misinterpret the meaning of a crisis.”²¹ Finally, the common, but unfortunate cultural stereotype that working with children is “woman’s work” can cause some lay leaders to avoid children in need. Regardless of the reason, however, the reality is that children both need and deserve pastoral care as much as adults, so it is important that elders and deacons confront and overcome any hesitations they might have and be ready to care for all ages in their congregation.

As has been discussed in an earlier chapter, the ministry of the church is an extension and continuation of Jesus’ ministry. The Gospel of Mark tells of a time when the disciples became upset that people were “bothering” Jesus by bringing their children to him. Instead of rebuking the people, however, Jesus rebuked the disciples saying, “Let the little children come to me; do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs” (Mark 10:14). Children were obviously important to Jesus, so they should be equally important to the church and her leaders today, and since a crisis can have a significant impact on a child’s spiritual growth and development, it becomes increasingly essential that they receive pastoral care when needed. In fact, on another occasion, Jesus also said that, “If any of you put a stumbling block before one of these little ones who believe in me, it would be better for you if a great millstone were hung

²¹ Lester, *Pastoral Care with Children in Crisis*, 29.

around your neck and you were thrown into the sea” (Mark 9:42). All persons, regardless of age, learn and grow as a result of their experiences, both positive and negative.

Difficult situations, especially, hold great potential for spiritual growth, and it is often the spiritual leader who offers pastoral care who has the privilege and responsibility of guiding an individual toward God and that spiritual growth. Helping a child understand the spiritual dimensions of a crisis and God’s enduring promises of love and caring, as well as modeling a belief in God’s continued presence and control can enable children to learn these truths for themselves and integrate them into their lives. Lester maintains that “we have a unique opportunity to incarnate the gospel to children in ways no one else can do.”²² Children learn to trust God by experiencing the faithfulness of those who profess God and who represent God in the church. If spiritual leaders ignore children and their needs, they run a dangerous risk of leading the child to believe that God does not care for them either.

Ignoring a child in a crisis situation can also produce a distorted interpretation of the crisis for the child. Inattentiveness can lead to children experiencing suppressed emotions, developing a sense of denial and forming faulty conclusions about God and faith. As the well-known Christian counselor and author, H. Norman Wright, points out, “Crisis in a child can have long-lasting effects because it may make the child less capable of dealing with trauma in the future.”²³ Those who are called by God to minister to children in crisis have the opportunity to not only lessen long-term effects that are negative, but also to foster positive ones. There is often a temptation to “protect” children by withholding information as well, but this too can adversely affect a child. It

²² Lester, *Pastoral Care with Children in Crisis*, 44.

²³ H. Norman Wright, *Crisis Counseling: Helping People in Crisis and Stress* (San Bernardino, CA: Here’s Life Publishers, 1985), 155.

can cause them to doubt themselves and their perceptions of reality, and it can also teach them to be suspicious of adults. This is not to say that children should be exposed to graphic details or disturbing facts. Children should be given information, but in such a way that is age and developmentally appropriate. Without adequate information, children will be forced to fill in the gaps with their imagination, and generally what they imagine will be far worse than what actually is.

Ignoring children can also cause them to feel abandoned. This is the opposite of pastoral care, which seeks to validate the person and support them in the midst of struggle and tribulation. Good pastoral care with children includes listening to them. This can be hard because they do not communicate as adults do, but it is vitally important, because it lets them know that they are valued and conveys love and a willingness to meet them where they are. Often, pastoral care is simply a ministry of presence, and pastoral care with a child is no different. In being present with children in crisis, lay leaders can make a connection with them through play, because this is how children relate to their world. Some adults may view play as a waste of time, especially in the midst of a crisis, but in reality, play is the way in which children seek to make sense of their world and practice being human. Puppets, games, drawing, coloring and writing are all wonderful ways to interact with a child and enable them to express themselves and their feelings in a safe and familiar manner.

As adults engage with children in supporting them through a difficult time, it is critical that they are careful about boundaries. In their innocence, children tend to trust easily and, sadly, that trust can be easily taken advantage of. Adult pastoral care givers can protect the child and themselves by ensuring that parents are aware and approve of

their interaction with the child, and whenever possible, at least one parent should be in close proximity to the interaction. It is also advisable to partner with another spiritual leader when talking to, or playing with children. Not only does this increase the attention the child will receive, but it also provides a safeguard for everyone involved. Physical touch, for both children and adults can be both comforting and healing, but only if it is done appropriately. Lay leaders need to consider their actions and motivations carefully as they share God's love in pastoral care.

Pastoral care with children will not necessarily be the easiest call that elders and deacons will face, but it can be one of the most rewarding. As a family of faith, all Christians are responsible for the children, in both good times and bad, and how lay leaders respond to them will have a significant impact on the lives of both the child and the caregiver, as well as the future of the church. During his ministry, Jesus told his followers that "Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes not me but the one who sent me" (Mark 9:37). Today's children are tomorrow's church, so it is important that they are welcomed in all circumstances and situations with loving, caring and supportive arms.

Knowing Your Abilities and Limitations

As discussed earlier, Paul refers to the church as a body (1 Cor 12:12-26). This is an apt analogy because the church, then and now, consists of many members with many different gifts and talents, and it is only with the cooperation and interworking of these gifts and talents through the individuals that possess them that the church can function as God intends and as the world needs. It is with this concept in mind that this manual has

been conceived and created, so that lay leaders can be equipped and empowered to assist pastors in meeting the ministry and pastoral care concerns in our churches and communities, ensuring that no needs are left wanting. This concept also undergirds an important word of advice for lay leaders, however, which is to know the extent of your abilities and limitations.

God has created diversity among people and within the church because no one individual can shoulder the burden alone. There is a tendency, however, for those involved in ministry and pastoral care to assume too much responsibility and to serve beyond their capabilities. This tendency may arise from a sincere desire to help and make a difference in the face of overwhelming need. The person may simply be so willing that their eagerness extends them past their abilities. It is important to remember that God will never call Christians to a ministry that God has not first equipped and prepared them for. So, if you are feeling in over your head, it is possible that your desire to serve is driving you, rather than God's call to serve. It is also possible for pastoral caregivers to develop a "super hero complex." There is often a feeling of fulfillment and satisfaction associated with helping someone, and this feeling can fill an unmet need in the caregiver. When this happens, it is possible for the person to seek new and greater ways to fill that need, causing them to adopt the "Mighty Mouse mentality" of "here I come to save the day." This is neither healthy for the caregiver, nor helpful for the person in need. If this situation is occurring, it is essential that the spiritual leader discern the source of their unmet need and address it in a manner that does not involve the pastoral care of others.

Pastoral care should always be about doing what is best for the individual requiring pastoral care. As such, there is no room for spiritual pride, ego or personal agendas. A good pastoral caregiver will be aware of their abilities and limitations. They will continually be seeking to grow, but they will know when they are not the person who can be most helpful. If a situation is beyond their capacity, they will refer it to another lay leader, or to the pastor. Pastors, too, make referrals to other professional caregivers, such as doctors, psychiatrists, counselors and agencies when their expertise will be more beneficial for the person in need. It will not always be easy to admit that there is a circumstance that is outside of the scope of your gifts, but doing so may be the most caring action in a given situation, because it may be what enables the individual to get the help they need.

There is much more that could be written about lay ministry and pastoral care. The material presented in this manual is just a beginning, but a beginning that will, hopefully, lead elders and deacons to read and learn more. Pastoral care is a calling from God, a calling to care, and your response will be different in each situation and circumstance. No one work, therefore, will ever completely prepare you for what God may call you to, but the good news is that there are resources to give you a start, there are people to whom you can reach out, and there is the ever-present and unfailing power of the Holy Spirit that will enable you to answer God's call and continue Jesus' mission of love and caring in a broken and hurting world.

APPENDIX 1. SPIRITUAL GIFTS INVENTORY

A Spiritual Gifts Inventory is one method of determining your spiritual gifts. There are many books and on-line assessment resources available. Each is slightly different, but all can lead you to an awareness of the gifts God has blessed you with; and since God gives these gifts so that they can be used in ministry, it is important that every elder and deacon make an effort to discern the gifts they possess. This will enable them, then, to begin developing these gifts, so that they can be used in the service of God, the church, others and themselves.

The following Spiritual Gifts Inventory comes from the website of the Disciple Making Ministry,¹ and is included in this manual by permission from its author.² It consists of eighty statements, and takes about thirty minutes to complete. The statements are varied. They describe concrete actions, descriptive traits and statements of belief. Remember, this is an assessment, so there are no wrong answers.

This particular Spiritual Gifts Inventory has been chosen because its statements tend to be clear and easily understood, regardless of the person's faith experiences or years in the church. This author has used it successfully with individuals, small groups and whole congregations, but does recommend some form of education preceding the introduction of the Inventory. This is especially true if the Inventory is being used with an individual or whole congregation, but even in small groups, it is important to ensure that there is some foundational understanding in what spiritual gifts are, why they are given and how they can benefit the church.- Even with this understanding, this author has

¹ Disciple Making Ministry, "Spiritual Gifts Inventory" (<http://www.d-m-m.org/support-files/giftstest.pdf>, accessed 1-23-11), 1.

² Permission was granted to use this Spiritual Gifts Inventory on December 20, 2011 by Michael Stubbs.

discovered that the inventory can result in a combination of guarded excitement, “God can use me, really?” and confused denial, “I am not sure this can be possible.” Either way, patient and continual education can enable people to accept and nurture their gifts, and also empower them to share those gifts in ministry and service to God and God’s church.

Helpful Hints in taking the Inventory: Take your time. There is no need to rush.

Go with your first response, it's usually your real belief.

Do not ask for help from others.

Select the one response that best describes you.

Your response choices are: 4 – Describes me consistently, definitely true
 3 – Describes me most of the time, usually true
 2 – Describes me half of the time
 1 – Describes me some of the time, once in a while
 0 – Describes me not at all, never

- _____ 1. I am able to organize ideas, things, time, and people for more effective results.
- _____ 2. I receive much joy from working with my hands at various arts and crafts.
- _____ 3. I find that my skills in building or repairing objects benefit others.
- _____ 4. I like sharing with other people how God has changed my life.
- _____ 5. I am able to share words of encouragement with those who are struggling in life.
- _____ 6. There have been times when I have felt sure I knew God's specific will for the future, even when others have not been sure.
- _____ 7. I am so confident that God will meet my needs that I give to God sacrificially and consistently.
- _____ 8. I find joy in being a help to someone who can utilize my help and concern.
- _____ 9. My home is always open to people passing through who need a place to stay.
- _____ 10. When I am asked to pray for others, I feel that my prayers will have tangible results.
- _____ 11. Oftentimes, I am able to perceive what is the heart or mind of another person without them telling me.
- _____ 12. I am able to motivate people into getting things done.
- _____ 13. I enjoy doing things to comfort people during sickness or times of problems or anxiety.
- _____ 14. When I am singing, I feel a great sense of joy.
- _____ 15. I would appreciate being involved in an instrumental music presentation.
- _____ 16. I appreciate being called on to do things for other people.

- ____ 17. I have enjoyed relating to a certain group of people over a long period of time, sharing personally in their successes and failures.
- ____ 18. I feel that I can communicate Biblical truths to others so they are helped.
- ____ 19. When important decisions need to be made, I sense a confidence in God's guidance.
- ____ 20. When I use my ability to write, I know that others will learn and grow from it.
- ____ 21. I am able to plan and administer programs which will be of benefit to others.
- ____ 22. I enjoy the times that I am able to create beautiful items with my hands.
- ____ 23. I enjoy the work necessary for gardening, landscaping, and other projects.
- ____ 24. I feel comfortable telling others how God has changed my life.
- ____ 25. I am able to talk with and build up those who are having difficulties in life, whether they are in despair, sorrow, or not sure of themselves.
- ____ 26. When I am in a group, I am the one others look to for vision and direction.
- ____ 27. I am ready to forego certain privileges in order to give the money to God's work.
- ____ 28. When I serve the Lord, I really don't care who gets the credit.
- ____ 29. I enjoy inviting visitors and guests home to dinner after Sunday morning worship.
- ____ 30. I take prayer requests very seriously and pray until the answer comes.
- ____ 31. I have the ability to discover new truths for myself through reading and observing a situation first hand.
- ____ 32. I am able to lead small and/or large groups of people into making decisions.
- ____ 33. I enjoy helping and working with those people who are ignored by others.
- ____ 34. In the area of vocal music, I enjoy performing alone and/or in a group of singers.
- ____ 35. When playing an instrument, I intuitively sense where the music is flowing, rather than relying completely on a written musical score.
- ____ 36. I enjoy other people asking me to lend a helping hand.
- ____ 37. I feel comfortable leading a small group in Bible study.
- ____ 38. I find it rewarding to teach people more about the Lord.

- ___ 39. When a person has a problem, as a Christian I can frequently see what is best to do.
- ___ 40. I find pleasure in composing and writing paragraphs and stories for the growth of others.
- ___ 41. I can easily delegate important responsibilities to other people.
- ___ 42. I find joy in having a beautiful lawn, flowers, and shrubs which are properly placed and cared for.
- ___ 43. The repair and maintenance of things comes easily to me.
- ___ 44. It is easy for me to talk to other people about life and/or spiritual matters.
- ___ 45. I am able to speak words of encouragement to those who are troubled, discouraged, or not sure of themselves.
- ___ 46. I am able to trust in the reliability of God when all else looks dim.
- ___ 47. I am content to maintain a lower standard of living in order to financially benefit God's work.
- ___ 48. It pleases me when I do things behind the scenes and others are helped.
- ___ 49. I am able to provide food and/or lodging graciously and willingly to people who are in need.
- ___ 50. I find myself praying when I could be doing other things.
- ___ 51. Through study or experience, I have been able to discern the wisest course of action to take in a major decision.
- ___ 52. When a group I am in is lacking organization, I tend to step in to fill the gap.
- ___ 53. Sometimes when I help people out, I know they may not even say "thank you" but I still enjoy helping them.
- ___ 54. I enjoy singing familiar Gospel songs with a group of fellow Christians.
- ___ 55. I know my performance of instrumental music has been a blessing to others.
- ___ 56. I respond cheerfully when asked to do a job, even it is menial.
- ___ 57. I enjoy leading small groups of people, especially when I am able to show genuine care and concern for them.
- ___ 58. I enjoy helping others learn things about Scripture which aid in building them up.
- ___ 59. I can intuitively arrive at solutions to fairly complicated problems.

- _____ 60. I am able to put my thoughts and ideas into positive, written form.
- _____ 61. I am able to set goals and objectives, and then make plans to reach them.
- _____ 62. I find joy in painting pictures or in making handcrafted objects.
- _____ 63. I find joy in lawn care and other outside maintenance.
- _____ 64. When I share my faith with others, I see positive results in their lives.
- _____ 65. I often share words of comfort, cheer, or encouragement with others.
- _____ 66. I really believe that God will not let me down, even though everything around me seems to be falling apart.
- _____ 67. I really enjoy giving my time and treasures to God's work.
- _____ 68. I am able to assist key leaders to relieve them of detail work, so they can get back to their main job.
- _____ 69. When people visit me at home, I am confident they feel good about being there.
- _____ 70. I regard prayer as one of my favorite spiritual exercises.
- _____ 71. I am able to pick up on important biblical truths that benefit myself and others.
- _____ 72. People look at me as a leader when things need to be done.
- _____ 73. I enjoy working with those less fortunate than me.
- _____ 74. I am able to lead others in singing.
- _____ 75. I enjoy using my instrumental music talents for the appreciation of my friends and to the glory of God.
- _____ 76. I enjoy being a follower more than a leader.
- _____ 77. I have brought friends or relatives back to faith who have strayed away.
- _____ 78. I enjoy teaching children or adults about God's love.
- _____ 79. If one of my friends is faced with a problem, I am able to sort out what God's will is for them.
- _____ 80. I enjoy writing words that will be of benefit to those who read them.

Scoring Your Survey:

1. Place in each box your numerical response (0-4) to the statement item number which is indicated in the box.
2. For each gift, add the numbers in the boxes and put in the total box.

Administration	1.	+ 21.	+ 41.	+ 61.	=	Total
Craftsmanship (arts/crafts)	2.	+ 22.	+ 42.	+ 62.	=	Total
Craftsmanship (manual)	3.	+ 23.	+ 43.	+ 63.	=	Total
Evangelism	4.	+ 24.	+ 44.	+ 64.	=	Total
Exhortation	5.	+ 25.	+ 45.	+ 65.	=	Total
Faith	6.	+ 26.	+ 46.	+ 66.	=	Total
Giving	7.	+ 27.	+ 47.	+ 67.	=	Total
Helps	8.	+ 28.	+ 48.	+ 68.	=	Total
Hospitality	9.	+ 29.	+ 49.	+ 69.	=	Total
Prayer	10.	+ 30.	+ 50.	+ 70.	=	Total
Knowledge	11.	+ 31.	+ 51.	+ 71.	=	Total
Leadership	12.	+ 32.	+ 52.	+ 72.	=	Total
Mercy	13.	+ 33.	+ 53.	+ 73.	=	Total
Music (vocal)	14.	+ 34.	+ 54.	+ 74.	=	Total
Music (instrumental)	15.	+ 35.	+ 55.	+ 75.	=	Total
Serving	16.	+ 36.	+ 56.	+ 76.	=	Total
Shepherding	17.	+ 37.	+ 57.	+ 77.	=	Total
Teaching	18.	+ 38.	+ 58.	+ 78.	=	Total
Wisdom	19.	+ 39.	+ 59.	+ 79.	=	Total
Writing	20.	+ 40.	+ 60.	+ 80.	=	Total

Now that you know your spiritual gifts, list the gifts with the top three scores below:

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

The possibilities for using your gifts in the church are endless. Look to where God is leading you!

APPENDIX 2- SUGGESTED USE IN TRAINING PURPOSES

As much as this manual attempts to provide for the individual reader, there is simply no substitute for ongoing group training. Ongoing training not only ensures that elders and deacons are well-versed in their various roles and responsibilities and have a clear understanding of what it means to be an elder or deacon, but it also functions to strengthen the bonds between them, which is so important in effective ministry and in the elder's and deacon's ability to support one another in that ministry.

How the elders and deacons of a church choose to implement this training is up to them. This manual has been designed to aid in the process of training by providing some information for education and discussion, but it does not provide a specific training program to follow. For this reason it is also advisable to access additional resources, readings and presenters to supplement the material in this manual, and to keep the training fresh and engaging for those involved.

The use of this manual for training might include focusing on one topic each month. This focus could begin with a discussion at the monthly meeting, and then include further reading as "homework," or it could begin with a section of the manual as assigned reading prior to the meeting, with a training experience/discussion included in the meeting. The training could also be entirely addressed at an elders or deacons meeting, although this approach requires greater time during the meeting. An additional possibility for training, or as a supplement to training, is to address topics at a retreat.

Regardless of the topic or method of training, or what materials are used, however, the most important aspect of any training program is that it exists and exists regularly. Without regular training, the ministry of elders and deacons can become weak

and ineffective. Regular training in ministry, just as in athletics, strengthens, invigorates and empowers people for greater and more effective work.

APPENDIX 3- LITERATURE REVIEW

Understanding God's call to serve and discerning the specifics of that call is important, but it is only the first step. It is then important to commit yourself to continued reading and hands-on learning so that you can develop the gifts and talents God has blessed you with. A dedication to sustained growth benefits you, both as a Christian, and within your call. As human beings, we are always maturing in our faith and trusting the Holy Spirit to guide us to becoming more than what we currently are, so to seek to grow in knowledge and understanding is not an admission of weakness, but rather an assumption of responsibility. We develop in direct proportion to our willingness to do so, and as people called by God to love and serve others, our willingness to develop will determine our effectiveness in ministry and how God will be able to use us. With this in mind, the following section offers a review of the primary published resources that this manual has drawn upon. It is divided according to specific areas of interest in an effort to help you focus your exploration. The hope is that this introduction will be a guide for you as you seek avenues for your own continued growth and learning.

Elders

If you have been called as an elder in your church you have been given a wonderful opportunity. You have also assumed an awesome responsibility. Your ability to seize that opportunity, as well as to fulfill that responsibility will be bolstered by your study in what an elder is, particularly from a biblical standpoint. There are many published resources that can aid you in your investigation, including those that have

contributed to this manual. Having a wide range of choices can be beneficial because there will usually be such a good variety of theological positions, denominational stances and scholarly approaches that you can choose the works that are the best fit for your situation and calling. This wide variety can also become confusing, however, because it can present so many choices that you may not be sure which will be most useful for your specific circumstances. In selecting a resource for further reading on elders, therefore, it is advantageous to determine what the book presents, particularly in terms of biblical background and theological position.

Theological and doctrinal viewpoints may diverge very slightly in some areas of Christian practice and more radically in others. The office and responsibilities of elders is one area where there can be significant divergence. A perfect example of this is found in *The Elders of the Church* by Lawrence Eyres. Eyres' book reads more like a manifesto than a manual, and clearly presents the belief that men alone can be called to serve as elders. In discussing the scriptural qualifications of elders he writes, "The first of these is that elders must be men, and only men."¹ This declaration, in addition to the insistent style of presentation, makes Eyres' book appear biased and may make it difficult for readers to give credence to his discussions about elders. Fortunately, while other available resources on eldership may hold to this same belief that elders must be male, they are not as absolute in their writing and allow the readers to glean important information that is more theologically universal.

Christians may vary in their theological positions, but they all hold the Bible in common as a foundational measure of their faith and beliefs. This common foundation

¹ Lawrence R. Eyres, *The Elders of the Church* (Philadelphia, PA: The Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1975), 25.

provides a focal point for discussion and learning across denominational differences. Gary Straub's book, *Your Calling as an Elder* is an excellent example of this. Straub presents a clear and thorough discussion on both the background of elders in the Bible, and the scriptural qualifications for elders. In discussing qualifications, he divides the overall list from 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9 into positive and negative characteristics, in others words, into the traits and actions an elder should demonstrate and those they should not. This division is helpful in fostering a better practical understanding of the many qualifications.

Similarly, *Why Elders? A Biblical and Practical Guide for Church Members* by Benjamin Merkle provides a biblical understanding of the role and duties of an elder, as well as a division of the qualifications into categories. Merkle's approach delivers even greater clarity of these qualifications, because he goes beyond simply positive and negative and discusses them in terms of situational qualifications, family qualifications and moral qualifications. Not only does this division aid in the understanding of the characteristics outlined in the Bible, but it also offers churches a clear guide for investigation as they are evaluating potential elders. Additionally, Merkle provides a detailed and convincing argument for the titles of "elder" and "overseer" belonging to the same office. He also believes that the biblical use of "pastor" is interchangeable with the titles "elder" and "overseer" as well. A comparable case for interchangeability is made by Phil Newton in his book, *Elders in Congregational Life*.

The one possible drawback to Merkle's and Newton's books is their apparent purpose. Unlike Straub's book and many others, including *The Caring Elder: A Training Manual for Serving* by Victor Constien and even Lawrence Eyres' *The Elders of the*

Church, their books seem to be written, not primarily to educate new or existing elders on their roles and responsibilities, but rather to make a case for eldership in the church. In this purpose, Merkle succeeds overwhelmingly, and provides an invaluable resource for any church considering the usefulness of elders and their significance from a biblical perspective. *Why Elders?* makes a strong case for the New Testament foundations of eldership, presents a thorough account on the responsibilities of elders and, as has already been discussed, offers a clear and comprehensive explanation of both qualifications and titles. For all of these reasons, *Why Elders?* is as valuable a resource for individual elders as it is for churches. Newton's book, while appropriately subtitled *Rediscovering the Biblical Model for Church Leadership*, is not as strong as Merkle's. It is still a beneficial resource for churches, however, especially those in the Baptist tradition, from which he writes, but in comparison to Merkle's arguments, Newton is not as thorough and tends to present more opinion than biblical support. His is a good companion to *Why Elders?* and may work best in a Baptist setting, but overall is not as solid in its presentation, and does not speak as clearly to individual elders.

In terms of a handbook or guide for elders, Straub's book, *Your Calling as an Elder* rises to the top. He begins by addressing the elder reader directly, first acknowledging, and then addressing their possible doubts and questions about their calling. He presents a careful exploration of Acts 20:28-31, 1 Peter 5:2-3 and James 5:14 and discusses the duties of an elder in these scriptures. He also includes a chapter on the theology of the cross and the chalice, which provides an understanding of the "why" of eldership that undergirds the "what" and the "how" discussed in the other books, as well as one on sustaining one's self as an elder, which contains examples of scripture, hymns,

journaling guidelines and instructions for spiritual practices that nourish the spirit. In all of this, Straub expresses a genuine care for elders and for ensuring that they are properly equipped to answer the call God places before them.

The Caring Elder: A Training Manual for Serving by Victor Constein is another valuable reference guide and training tool. In addition to chapters on the elder's role in teaching, witnessing, fellowship and pastoral care, including a discussion on ministering to those dealing with death and grief, each chapter concludes with questions to guide further reflection and conversation. Many of the other books on elders mention some of these duties, but none provide a treatment as thorough as Constein's. The chapter that really stands out in *The Caring Elder* is the one on the elder's responsibilities regarding worship. Not only does he detail the importance of an elder in congregational worship, but he also explores the significance of private worship and family worship for the elder's spiritual growth and well-being. As beneficial as Constein's efforts are, however, his book alone would not adequately prepare an elder for their role and responsibilities in the church. He offers some discussion of the background and qualifications of elders, but it is not as biblical or as comprehensive as that found in Straub's or Merkle's books. *The Caring Elder* is an excellent resource as a practical guide to being an effective elder, but it should be supplemented by a book with more foundational and scriptural information, such as *Why Elders?* or *Your Calling as an Elder*.

These are just a few of the books available on eldership, and it is a good place to begin. As you read and grow, you will find that there are areas of responsibility within the broad calling of elders that God is calling you to, and you can fine-tune your educational efforts as you discover these. It will also be helpful to share with other elders

within your church and denomination. Ask them what resources they have found helpful, and share what has had an impact on your development as an elder and as a Christian. In this way, not only will you be able to continue your journey, but the church as a whole will be strengthened by the fellowship and networking of church leaders.

Deacons

The office of deacon has its origins in the New Testament church, and as such, there is much that can be learned about being a deacon from an exploration of these scriptures and the scholarly reflection on them. As was noted in the section above on elders, differences of opinion exist regarding the specific interpretation of the scriptures, however. It is important, therefore, to be aware of these differences and of what positions will be presented in different published resources as one seeks to grow through further reading. A difficulty in this selection process arises from the unfortunate fact that there are far fewer resources available for deacons than there are for elders. The wide variety of books that was discussed above is not present for the diaconate, and as a result, individuals called as deacons must begin their reading with an even more open mind and an ability to separate what is helpful and applicable from what is not.

An example of an interpretation that differs from the one presented in this manual is Alexander Strauch's position that only men can be called as deacons, which he bases on his interpretation of 1 Timothy 3:11. In his book, *The New Testament Deacon: The Church's Minister of Mercy*, Strauch concludes that the scripture refers to the wives of deacons rather than female deacons, and, therefore, deacons are intended to be male, with their wives playing a supportive role in their ministry. This may be the belief and

practice of many Christian denominations, but many mainline protestant denominations, including the United Church of Christ allow women to serve as deacons. This presents a potential dilemma for individuals and churches wanting to be true to the biblical word, and so further research and reading becomes necessary. The conclusions represented in this manual that the scripture does, in fact, refer to female deacons were drawn after extensive exegetical study, including an exploration of the original Greek language. There is, unfortunately, no other book specifically on the diaconate that presents this same position, so, other than an investigation of biblical commentaries, there is no other resource to contrast with Strauch's. The other two books used in the writing of this manual, *Now That You're a Deacon* by Howard Foshee and *Handbook for Deacons* by J. D. O'Donnell do not address the issue directly, although they do exclusively use male pronouns in the references to deacons.

One reason for the absence of any contrasting material to Alexander Strauch's position on the role of women in the diaconate is that all of the books gathered for the writing of this manual, as well as a few others that are not from the Catholic or Episcopal tradition, are written from a Baptist perspective, a perspective that can represent a different theological viewpoint than mainline Protestant denominations, such as the United Church of Christ and Presbyterian denominations. Because there is nothing written on the role and responsibilities of deacons from these denominational traditions, at least that has been published, it can be difficult for deacons in these churches to read and grow in their understanding of their position and function. It is possible, however, to utilize the books that are available, including those by Strauch, Foshee and O'Donnell

because all of these are biblically based and, with the exception of the role of women in the diaconate, present information that is both valuable and universally applicable.

Howard Foshee's book, *Now That You're a Deacon*, is a great example of this. His book is clearly written from a Southern Baptist perspective, including a chapter on understanding the denomination, but because he primarily draws from a common biblical starting point, it is relatively easy to look beyond the specific details that do not match mainline Protestant practices, and grasp the many fundamental truths and points of wisdom and practice that are universally applicable. Since this book is one of only a few published works on deacons, the important information it contains for deacons should be utilized, despite the denominational distinctions.

Strauch's book, *The New Testament Deacon: The Church's Minister of Mercy*, is also a valuable resource for understanding the diaconate from a biblical basis. He explores three of the scriptural accounts that mention deacons, from Acts 6:1-7, Philippians 1:1 and 1 Timothy 3:8-13. Each section contains a comprehensive examination of how the scripture helps to define and guide today's deacons. He employs sound biblical scholarship to exegete the texts before he draws his conclusions and offers his commentary with regard to deacons. Strauch's writing presents additional information that can flush out a study of Acts 6:1-7 and 1 Timothy 3:8-13 and help churches to build a thorough understanding of the qualifications for deacons. His book can also be helpful for deacons in expanding their awareness of the biblical expectations of their position.

As it is reflected in Strauch's work, most of the information contained in the Bible regarding deacons is about the qualifications necessary for being appointed to that

position in the church. There are no specific references to the responsibilities that deacons did, or should assume, although some can be inferred from the qualifications required. It is important, therefore, that both churches and deacons have a clear understanding of these qualifications and, as stated above, Strauch provides a good starting point for this. J.D. O'Donnell's book, *Handbook for Deacons*, then, is a wonderful compliment to the more exegetical approach that Strauch offers. In fact, O'Donnell's explanations supplied valuable information and insights for the discussions in this manual on the qualifications of the diaconate.

Building on the biblical foundation laid out by both Strauch and O'Donnell, Howard Foshee explores some of the "hows" and "whys" of deacons in *Now That You're a Deacon*. This, again, is presented from a Baptist perspective, but there are still many important truths to be gleaned from his presentation. For example, the chapters on how a deacon becomes a partner for the pastor and how the qualifications for deacons translate into their service within the church are especially helpful in understanding the roles and responsibilities of deacons, regardless of the church or denomination. In addition, J. D. O'Donnell's discussion on relationships and responsibilities and duties dovetails nicely with much of what Foshee presents.

Each of these books, *The New Testament Deacon*, *Now That You're a Deacon* and *Handbook for Deacons*, provide important insights into the role and responsibilities of deacons. No one of these books alone will offer deacons in mainline Protestant traditions a complete understanding of how they are to function in their churches, largely because they are all written from a different denomination perspective. Where denominational traditions differ, however, each of these works can be read for the universal truths that are

found in the Bible. Strauch, Foshee and O'Donnell all present clear and responsible discussions of the qualifications and purpose of deacons, based on an interpretation of the scriptures that, by in large, is common throughout the Christian faith. It would be advantageous if there were additional resources available from a mainline Protestant viewpoint, but since none currently exist, deacons from these denominations can look to these books to supplement their growth as leaders in the church.

Pastoral Care

Additional reading and research in the area of pastoral care is essential to the continued effectiveness of an elder, deacon or other lay minister. This is because there are so many potential situations that can arise and such a vast collection of available resources that address these situations. As a result, it is practically impossible for any one site or book to contain all that will need to be learned and practiced. Continual growth and development in pastoral care may also result in the lay minister discerning gifts that have been given for particular circumstances. For example, an individual may discover that they are gifted in dealing with children, or in visiting older members in nursing home settings, or in ministering to families who are grieving. As these gifts are detected, it will be critical that they are cultivated through prayer, reading and practice. The following section discusses a few of the many books available on one or more areas of pastoral care.

To begin with, it is important for lay leaders to grow in the basics of pastoral care. Creating a foundational understanding of lay shepherding will benefit future pastoral care efforts, because it will provide a solid underpinning for all you may be called to do. In

developing this foundational understanding, Leroy Howe's book, *A Pastor in Every Pew: Equipping Laity for Pastoral Care*, is an outstanding resource. Howe details many of the fundamentals of pastoral care, including thorough discussions on listening, confidentiality and self-disclosure as part of caregiving. He also offers a helpful guide for prayer and an introduction to several counseling techniques, including when and how to give advice and homework and the practices of mirroring and re-framing. In addition, Howe discusses appropriate uses of scripture during pastoral caregiving, and he also cautions the reader against the misuse of scripture, explaining what that might be and how it might come about. The strongest aspect of *A Pastor in Every Pew*, however, is Howe's writing on the five basics of a shepherding relationship. These five basics, empathy, genuineness, respect, hope and affirmation are clearly important to him as he commits a full chapter to each one. These chapters, as well as the rest of this book will fortify any lay minister for their call to and work in pastoral care, and should be strongly considered as part of a personal growth reading list.

Once a deacon, elder or other lay leader has a strong foundation in the basics of pastoral care, they are ready to begin exploring the "how-to's" of specific situations that can arise. There are many books that offer instruction in these areas, but *Lay Shepherding: A Guide for Visiting the Sick, the Aged, the Troubled, and the Bereaved* by Rudolph Grantham is a great place to start. Grantham's book is a good compliment to Howe's *A Pastor in Every Pew* because it essentially picks up where Howe leaves off. Whereas Howe offers a foundational understanding to pastoral care, Grantham builds on that understanding, both with additional instructional information, such as a wonderful working definition of a crisis, and also with strategies and "how-to" tips for dealing with

crises when they occur. The chapters on ministering to grieving individuals and making visits to hospitals and nursing homes are especially strong and provide valuable information for lay pastoral caregivers.

There are other good books that detail potential needs that can arise and require pastoral care, including *Called into Crisis: The Nine Greatest Challenges of Pastoral Care*, by James Berkley and *Crisis Counseling: Helping People in Crisis and Stress* by Norman Wright. Both address particular crises, although unlike Grantham's *Lay Shepherding*, neither are written specifically for the lay minister. In fact, Wright seems to be writing primarily for a reader who has been trained in counseling, and his writing frequently communicates like a text book. *Crisis Counseling*, therefore, tends not to be as engaging as Grantham's or Berkley's books, and may need to be mentally translated for use in a pastoral ministry context. The book is not without its merit, however, and should not be disregarded because of these drawbacks. The discussions about children in crisis, the crisis of adolescence and the crisis of life transitions are excellent. This is partly because of the material presented, but largely just because the topics are included in the first place. All three of these areas are obvious needs that can and do arise within churches and that may require pastoral caregiving, and yet this is one of only a few books that gives much, if any attention to the subjects. *Pastoral Care with Children in Crisis*, by Andrew Lester, which will be discussed later, does specifically address children in crisis, but focuses exclusively on that topic.

In contrast to Wright's book, James Berkley speaks directly to the pastoral care situation. His book tends to be geared to a minister or pastor, but the information he supplies is easily translatable into a lay ministry context. Berkley offers some wonderful

insight, not only to the types of crises that people experience, but also to their mindset during a crisis. He provides an exploration and discussion of nine different types of crises; marital conflict and divorce, sexual misconduct, domestic violence and abuse, homosexuality, major illnesses and injuries, death of a child, death of a spouse, suicide, and alcohol and drug problems. The discussions, for the most part, are thorough and very beneficial, although additional discussion in the section on homosexuality would be helpful, especially with regard to the crisis that may be experienced by the family of someone who announces that they are homosexual. The section centers almost entirely on counseling for the individual, but it can often be the family that initially comes forward and acknowledges a desire for counseling. Despite this one concern, however, Berkley's book can be a great asset to lay leaders involved in pastoral care, because he carefully addresses situations that can make the most experienced lay minister's knees go weak, and does so in a way that develops both the knowledge of how to address the situations, and the confidence to do so. Berkley also provides a "quicksan" section at the end of each chapter, which contains the practical information discussed about that particular crisis in an easily accessed format. Lay caregivers may find it helpful to make copies of these and stick them in their Bible, or car.

It should be noted that Berkley's book, like Wright's and Grantham's as well, is somewhat out of date, having been written in the 1980s. This is not a reason to disregard any of these books, as they all have much good and pertinent information to be shared, but it is something to be aware of. For example, in all of the crises that Berkley discusses, none include any consideration of how the internet, cell phones or social media might play a factor, and yet all of these more recent, technology-driven elements are very

much a part of people's lives, including the situations they face. Also, in Grantham's chapter on hospital visitation, he instructs the reader not to smoke when visiting a patient in their hospital room, which, of course, is no longer permitted in hospitals in general, and he says nothing of turning off your cell phone before entering the room for a visit. These are minor points, but they are worth mentioning because they require the lay leader to either supplement these books with more contemporary ones, or to fill in the "generational gaps" themselves.

In addition to books that address several areas of pastoral care, there are others that focus exclusively on one type of crisis or situation. These resources are especially valuable in instances where there is little information provided in the more generalized books, such as dealing with children, which *Pastoral Care with Children in Crisis* by Andrew Lester addresses thoroughly. Single topic books are also valuable in covering topics that are complicated and require greater discussion and exploration than a book that deals with multiple situations can afford. Examples of such topical books include *Dying for a Drink: What You and Your Family Should Know about Alcoholism* by Anderson Spickard Jr. and Barbara Thompson and *Healing Death: Finding wholeness when a cure is no longer possible* by Dennis Zimmerman. Lay leaders can turn to these books, and others like them as they continue in their growth and development, or as particular situations arise that require their attention.

Like Norman Wright, Andrew Lester recognizes that, while children do experience crisis, they do not experience it in the same ways that adults do. *Pastoral Care with Children in Crisis* may be written for ministers and pastors, but it offers great insights for all pastoral caregivers. It discusses the perceptions children have of the

world, as well as the general reactions they tend to have in various situations, and it does so in non-technical terms. It is not only very approachable, but it also seeks to provide both informational and practical knowledge. Lester does this by presenting the material into two halves. The first half contains discussions of crisis situations and how children perceive and respond to them, and the second provides suggestions and tips for the actual practice of dealing with children in crisis. The first part is important and informative, but the second half is even more valuable, because it transforms the information and makes it usable. For example, Lester discusses the importance of play for a child, and how play is the way a child learns how to be an adult and make sense of their reality. He suggests using play, therefore, when dealing with a child in a crisis situation, and describes a resource bag with games, puppets and simple art materials that can be easily assembled and enormously helpful. Lester is quick to say that not all approaches work in all situations and with all children, but the breadth of what he offers is sufficient to cover a multitude of situations, needs and children.

Healing Death and *Dying for a Drink* are both significant resources for complex and complicated pastoral care situations. Interestingly, neither book is really written for pastoral care purposes, but rather for the individuals and families involved. They both, however, provide excellent information on difficult topics, facing death and dealing with alcoholism respectively. A lay leader who has already developed a foundational understanding of pastoral care through Howe's *A Pastor in Every Pew*, or another such book, and who has at least some experience in caregiving should be able to glean the many valuable points in each of these books.

Healing Death: Finding wholeness when a cure is no longer possible by Dennis Zimmerman is written specifically for people who are dying and their families, but since situations involving death, or impending death often involve the church and a pastoral caregiver, it is also helpful from a pastoral care perspective, both to inform lay leaders, and as a helpful resource for the person who is dying and their family. Zimmerman is interested in what he calls “dying well,” and by that he means living the fullest life possible while dying. He offers words of compassion and encouragement, with one chapter specifically for the person who is dying and another for their family. This intentionality in recognizing and addressing the needs of each is one of the things that makes this book such a treasure. There are also discussions about the importance of acceptance, and about recognizing what control is available and then seizing it. Zimmerman focuses on the healing experience of death, which sounds strange at first, but becomes clear and meaningful as he explains how everyone involved can be empowered to live as they are dying. *Healing Death* is written in a very practical format. There is first a chapter with information about issues that are either being experienced, or that need to be addressed, and this chapter is then followed by a how-to chapter that offers points of how to actually put the information into practice. These points are given in real and empowering terms, and can, therefore, be a great guide for a pastoral caregiver who is walking with an individual or family through a terminal illness situation.

Similarly, Anderson Spickard and Barbara Thompson’s book, *Dying for a Drink: What You and Your Family Should Know about Alcoholism* is a real treasure. Like Zimmerman’s book, it is written specifically for the family involved in the situation, but it provides such a solid, strategic approach to dealing with the disease of alcoholism that

can be a valuable resource for pastoral caregivers and the church families of alcoholics as well. *Dying for a Drink* contains a great deal of information, tools and answers to questions. It includes a combination of statistics, facts and narratives from interviews, and it does not shy away from the tough discussions, including a chapter for families entitled, "What if the Alcoholic Never Stops Drinking?" It also addresses common myths, such as the alcoholic personality and broken homes as causes of alcoholism, and the discussion of early warning signs and symptoms is especially helpful. Spickard and Thompson are aware that, very often, a situation involving an alcoholic will first come to the church's attention through a family member, and also that family members themselves contribute, both positively and negatively, and consciously and unconsciously to the situation. In light of all of this, they provide guidelines and suggestions for addressing the issue with the alcoholic, as well as important points for staging an intervention. Throughout the book, Spickard and Thompson break through the silence and denial of alcoholism and address the embarrassment and shame it brings to a family in a manner that is not only constructive, but that is comforting as well.

Lay leaders involved in ministry and pastoral care would be wise to not only read these books as part of their ongoing growth and development, but also to purchase a copy of *A Pastor in Every Pew*, or another book that deals with the basics of pastoral care, and a book, or books, such as *Lay Shepherding* and *Called into Crisis* that address a few of the common situations that face caregivers in the church. Not only do they provide wonderful information, but they are resources that can be referred back to again and again for specific situations as they arise. They are also excellent resources for ongoing training, either on an individual basis, or in a group setting. In fact, it could be especially

helpful for churches to create a ministry and pastoral care library and keep a copy of these books, as well as others that can inform and equip deacons, elders and all lay leaders for their callings to serve.

APPENDIX 4- SUGGESTED READING AND RESOURCE LIST

The following list of books and online resources can offer additional information and guidance in your service as an elder or deacon. It is intended to be a starting point, with the hope that you will continue to add to it as you grow and develop, both as a lay minister and as a Christian. There are additional resources listed in the bibliography as well.

Personal Growth and Enrichment:

The Wounded Healer: Ministry in Contemporary Society –Henri J.M. Nouwen

Under the Unpredictable Plant: An Exploration in Vocational Holiness –Eugene H. Peterson

Shepherds After My Own Heart –Timothy S. Laniak

While Shepherds Watch Their Flocks –Timothy S. Laniak

Celebration of Discipline –Richard J. Foster

Listening to Your Life: Daily Meditations –Frederick Buechner

www.oddb.org (Our Daily Bread Devotional)

www.crosswalk.com/devotionals/homeword (HomeWord Devotional)

Ministering to Others:

Christian Caregiving: A Way of Life –Kenneth C. Haugk

Where is God When It Hurts –Philip Yancey

Well-Intentioned Dragons: Ministering to Problem People in the Church –Marshall Shelley

Invisible Wounds: Becoming Streetwise about Sexual Assault –Candace Walters

Anger and Assertiveness in Pastoral Care –David W. Augsburger

Lay Pastoral Caregiving –Timothy M. Farabaugh

When and How to Use Mental Health Resources –Kenneth C. Haugk

Stephen Ministry Training Manual, volumes 1 & 2 –Stephen Ministries

A Clergy Guide to End-of-Life Issues –Martha R. Jacobs

Healing After Loss: Daily Meditations for Working Through Grief –Martha Whitmore Hickman

Quick Scripture Reference for Counseling, third edition –John G. Kruis

A Good Death: Challenges, Choices and Care Options –Charles Meyer

www.theraveproject.com (The RAVE Project- domestic violence)

www.deathisnottheenemy.com (Death is not the Enemy- end of life issues)

Prayer:

The Oxford Book of Prayer –George Appleton, ed.

A Maryknoll Book of Prayer –Michael Leach & Susan Perry, eds.

www.thoughts-about-god.com/prayer

www.prayer-and-prayers.info/christian-prayers

Bible Study:

Reading the Bible for All Its Worth –Gordon D. Fee and Douglas Stuart

All the People of the Bible: An A-Z Guide to the Saints, Scoundrels, and other Characters in Scripture –Richard R. Losch

Illustrated Encyclopedia of the Bible –John Drance, ed.

The Oxford Companion to the Bible –Bruce M. Metzger & Michael D. Coogan, ed.

That's Easy for You to Say: Your Quick Guide to Pronouncing Bible Names –W. Murray Severance

New Bible Commentary –R. T. France

The IVP Bible Background Commentary: Old Testament –John H. Walton

The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament –Craig S. Keener

The Expositor's Bible Commentary- Abridged Edition: Two-Volume Set –Richard Polcyn

www.audio-bible.com/bible/bible.html

www.biblegateway.com

www.biblenotes.net

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VITA

Diane Marie Carter was born in Toledo, Ohio on April 5, 1967, and she was raised in Berkey, Ohio with her three siblings. After graduating from Evergreen High School, she attended The University of Toledo in Toledo, Ohio, where she earned a Bachelor of Arts Degree in Film and Theatre Production in 1990. Her interest in theatre production led her first to oversee the set construction shop at Bowling Green State University, and then to New York, where she coordinated events and productions at the Performing Arts Center at SUNY Purchase.

Missing the educational environment, Diane became the technical director and later production manager for the theatre department at Fordham University, Lincoln Center in New York City, which is where she was on September 11, 2001. She volunteered in the rescue and recovery efforts at Ground Zero, and the Freshkills site. As a result of her experiences, Diane felt a call to the ministry and enrolled in New York Theological Seminary in New York, NY, where she received a Master of Divinity Degree in 2007.

Diane was ordained as a Minister of Word and Sacrament in the United Church of Christ in June, 2007, and served the Norfield Congregational Church in Weston, CT as the associate pastor and youth minister for six years. From there, she was called as the pastor of St. Paul's United Church of Christ in Bellevue, Ohio, which is where she currently lives and serves.

Diane enrolled in the Doctor of Ministry Pastoral Skills track at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary in 2009 in order to continue growing as a pastor. She chose to create this manual as her thesis-project because she believes that equipping lay leaders in ministry and pastoral care will strengthen the Body of Christ and contribute to the building of God's Kingdom. This thesis-project is presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Doctor of Ministry degree, and Diane anticipates completing her doctoral studies in May 2012.